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NINJA TURTLES

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WOLFCOP
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ISSUE
403

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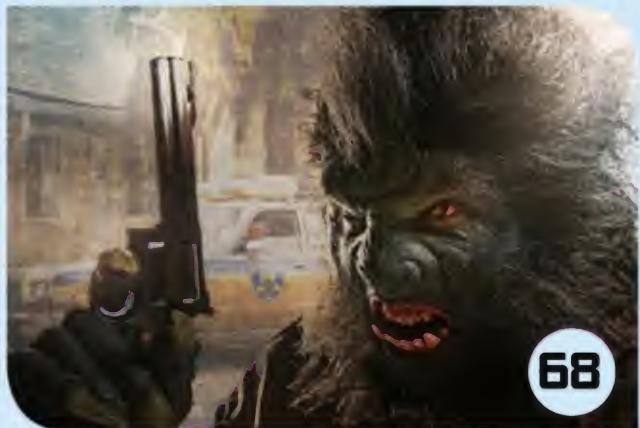
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EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 403.

It's incredible to believe that it was way back in 1984 that the saga of the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* began. I remember the afternoon I first caught sight of them vividly. I was hanging out in the Manchester University shopping precinct, and paid my weekly visit to *Odyssey 7* (any Mancunians remember that place?). There it was, Issue Number 1. The artwork was terrible, the printing was cheap and nasty, and the title was bonkers, so I promptly bought 4 copies. For these were simpler times, and the shelves far less crowded. A first issue would always be snapped up. Sadly I sold 3 of those copies when they reached the insane price of £1.00. How could I have known that they would now be worth four grand each.

The animated series and the Archie comic version of the Turtles hit the overdrive lever, and suddenly we were all immersed in the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles" era of 1989-1990, an era that culminated in the original *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* movie. As quickly as it had begun it seemed to be all over, and with the box office flop of *Turtles 3* it seemed to be the end. Little did I know that we were dealing with one of the most resilient franchises ever to make the leap beyond their comic book roots. Over the last thirty years, every time you feel certain they have munched their last pizza they manage to bounce back. I have definitely learned to never mark these guys out for the count. The cancellation of TV series and comic books seem never to be the end, and this year they are back again with the help of action maestro Michael Bay, this time in their biggest budget motion picture ever! STARBURST has been there every step of the way, and this issue we chart the progress of these half shell heroes from their black and white indie beginnings, to the mammoth franchise we have today.

I am glad to hear from so many of you that the introduction of two covers last month was so well received. This month we are sporting a fetching Michelangelo on our Newsstand cover, and a stunning rendition of the Fab Foursome by Paul Loudon for our Collectors' Edition.

Sorry for the absence of It's Only A Movie. Rest assured that it will be back as usual next month, and I will be sharing with you my thoughts on the latest instalment of the Apes saga.

Also featured in this issue: we talk to the creators behind two highly anticipated movies amongst many a STARBURST staffer, *Wolf Creek 2* and *WolfCop*; plus much, much more...

Please don't miss out on your chance to be chosen as our Star Letter. Just write in or email us at letters@starburstmagazine.com

Until next time, Keep watching the weird and wonderful...


Jordan M. Royce
EDITOR



THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE
BEST (AND WORST)
OF THIS MONTH'S
MOVIE / TV NEWS



DANGER MOUSE

Let's face it, if British producers are desperate enough to resurrect **Bananaman** (three issues on and we still can't process it either), then a reboot of a bona fide classic like **Danger Mouse** was only a matter of time. And come it has, with the BBC recently revealing that they're bringing back the Cosgrove Hall cartoon for a contemporary audience.

The original **Danger Mouse** ran an impressive 161 episodes, from 1982 to 1992, and featured the legendary pairing of UK icons David Jason and Terry Scott as the voices of the cocky secret agent Danger Mouse and his bumbling but loyal hamster sidekick Ernest Penfold respectively. The pair regularly did battle with a variety of colourful villains, chiefly the tyrannical toad Baron Silas Greenback.

The new series will again be animated (because real mice with drivers' licenses are still difficult to find these days, ones that can act doubly so), but will employ CG instead of the traditional cell technique (because children have been trained to think the latter is rubbish). As you can see from the early teaser image above, producers Freemantle studios haven't deviated too much from the classic design, although we're now promised DM will instead rock an iPad. Geddit? Expect the show to hit CBBC sometime in 2015.

Joining **Danger Mouse** (and bloody **Bananaman**), three other beloved children's properties were also scheduled for reboot treatment this month. (And when you're reading this bear in mind that the likes of **Popeye**, **Paddington**, **Peanuts**, **Thunderbirds** and **The Flintstones** are already in various stages of production!) First up, the batshit insane **Teletubbies** will return from their 13-year hiatus for a new 60 episode run. The show will incorporate some CG-tweaks (their odd stomping ground will now be a green screen recreation of the original real world setting), and adjustments to the characters include the fact their surreal stomach-embedded TV sets will now represent iPad-like touch screens, so tech-

savvy are today's toddlers. Sigh. Moving on to less obnoxious matters we have **The Powerpuff Girls**, who will be saving the city of Townsville on a weekly basis once more from 2016 onwards, and **Scooby Doo**, who will be selfishly saving his own arse in a new Warner Brothers live-action **Scooby-Dooby-do-over**. The latter is a particularly odd decision for the studio since it wasn't that long ago since that they stripped the previous live-action franchise of any star power or budget and relegated it to straight-to-DVD / TV movie status with 2009's **Scooby Doo! The Mystery Begins** and 2010's **Scooby Doo! Curse of the Lake Monster**. Thought the dog looked dreadful in the James Gunn scripted 2002 original? The CGI here is **Avatar**-standard in comparison, trust us.

So, given this increasingly aggressive trend of repackaging our favourite childhood properties, what do reckon we have to do to get a **Chorlton** and the **Wheelies** reboot happening?

PACIFIC RIM 2

As reported last issue, Guillermo del Toro had already started work on the script for a **Pacific Rim** sequel before it was even given the green light, but now we know that luckily his efforts will not be wasted, with Legendary Pictures and Universal finally committing to revisit the world of the Kaiju and Jaegers. As well as **Pacific Rim 2** being given an April 7th, 2017 release, both an animated series and further graphic novels (following on from last year's **Pacific Rim: Tales from Year Zero**), have also been announced. The writer/director has already made clear his plans to bring back the majority of the characters introduced in **Pacific Rim** for its sequel, and he's looking to officially start work on the follow-up in August of this year. The current expectation is that by the time **Pacific Rim 2** hits, the animated series will have been airing for a year and there will have been several graphic novels released.

In other del Toro news, he'll no longer be tackling the Emma Watson vehicle **Beauty and the Beast** for Warner Brothers after suddenly dropping out, but has hinted that his new friends at Legendary might want to revisit his long-cherished H.P. Lovecraft adaptation **At the Mountains of Madness** in the near future. The only caveat is, he could have to tone the material down to ensure a PG-13 rating, thus making it financially viable... I AP



Courtesy of director Colin Trevorrow's Twitter account, could this enigmatic snapshot be our first look at **Jurassic World's** cynically engineered super-beastie gone awol? We'll find out for sure next June...

BATMAN V SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE

If you thought that Zack Snyder's *Man of Steel* follow-up was already looking pretty stacked, this month brings word of even more new additions! With Ben Affleck playing Batman, Henry Cavill back as Superman, Gal Gadot as Wonder Woman and Ray Fisher as Victor Stone, aka Cyborg, we now have *Game of Thrones* and *Conan the Barbarian*'s Jason Momoa as Aquaman. Momoa's been linked to the film for months now, but he finally seems to be on board to play the King of Atlantis. Also joining the party is *Monsters* star Scoot McNairy. His role is unknown at this stage, although speculation flits from media mogul Morgan Edge to Hal Jordan to The Joker. Whilst there's rumours of Edge appearing as a secondary villain of sorts in *Batman v Superman*, certain speculation also claims that master assassin David Cain (father of Cassandra Cain, former Batgirl, current Black Bat), the Justice League-opposing Amanda Waller, and sadistic serial killer Mr. Zsasz could similarly appear in smaller roles. Additionally, the already-cast Tao Okamoto (*The Wolverine*) is rumoured to be playing Lex Luthor's right-hand woman, Mercy Graves. As for Lex, various reports claim that this version of Luthor, played by Jesse Eisenberg, will have long, dirty-blond hair, and Lexcorp will be portrayed as some hipster-type company, such as Facebook or Google. Whilst the hair may be longer (we're betting on that not lasting the course), it's said that this latest incarnation of Lex is as much of a sleazy dick as ever.

As well as casting news, this month saw some set images surface that could be taken as showing the possible death of Superman. Firstly we saw a concrete-like Superman statue on set, then later shots showed the statue destroyed and civilians laying flowers at the site in an almost memorial-like fashion. With *Batman v Superman* filming back-to-back with 2017's *Justice League*, there's talk that this particular scene could actually end up in the JL movie rather than this next DC effort. Either way, could the future of the DC cinematic world throw out a spin on the classic *Death of Superman* comic book arc? Given how the first glimpse at Cavill's

Superman return (shown above) looks, it seems that the Big Blue Boy Scout isn't exactly happy with how things are unfolding for him. Following on from May's first look at Affleck's gloomy Dark Knight, it seems the Last Son of Krypton is equally as miserable!

On the topic of the future DCCU, we've also gotten some hefty rumours on Warner Brothers and DC's plans for the next few years. Despite various reputable sources staking their reputations on this, including cult filmmaker Kevin Smith himself, take the next few lines with a giant pinch of salt until anything official drops. Here we go... following *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*'s May 2016 release, we'll get *Shazam!* in July, Joseph Gordon-Levitt's



Sandman in December, Zack Snyder's *Justice League* in May 2017, *Wonder Woman* in July 2017, a *Flash/Green Lantern* team-up movie in December 2017, and then *Man of Steel 2* in May 2018. Added to this, it appears Ben Affleck's Dark Knight will get his first solo outing in a 2019 movie tentatively titled *The Batman*. Whilst some of these movies were already known or expected, the Shazam movie and the team-up of The Flash and Green Lantern are certainly out of leftfield. As mentioned, don't take all of these movies for granted just yet, but it's expected that this month's Comic-Con will see some official announcements come from DC and Warner Bros. Naturally, we'll have the full rundown next month. | AP

THE HUNGER GAMES: MOCKINGJAY - PART 1



It's a shame we only have space to show you one of the seven superbly designed "in-universe" propaganda-style posters promoting November's eagerly awaited sequel, but be a good citizen and head to www.thecapitol.pm to check out the rest.

PREDATOR

After speculating last month on the subject of an *Alien* sequel, we got firm news regarding another beloved sci-fi franchise's return, as confirmation came that *Iron Man 3* director Shane Black is to write the treatment and direct Twentieth Century Fox's planned *Predator* sequel! He will then pass the script duties to Fred Dekker, with whom he co-wrote the 1987 cult favourite, *The Monster Squad*. Originally announced as a reboot, Black was quick to put the record straight, explaining that his film will instead "expand" and "explore" the existing mythology.

Of course, Black has some history with the franchise already, as he played the character of Hawkins in the original Schwarzenegger classic. Black is also still in line to direct both an adaptation of the Japanese horror franchise *Death Note*, and reintroduce cinema audiences to pulp hero *Doc Savage*, with Thor's Chris Hemsworth, reportedly testing for the role last month.

While the notion of a *Predator* reboot filled us with dread, now that we can expect (as the filmmaker himself put it) an "inventive sequel", we're very interested to see what Black and Dekker can make of it! MU

SHERLOCK

Miss them? After that cliffhanger to series three, it's been difficult to walk down the street without bumping into a rabid *Sherlock* fan demanding more and demanding it now, but no one's really known when the detective series will actually continue. That is until Martin Freeman let slip that plans are in place for a Christmas 2015 special. Deciding the cat was well and truly out of the bag on that one, the BBC have now confirmed that Freeman will indeed return as John Watson alongside Benedict Cumberbatch's Holmes in December next year. But there's more – this special will be followed by a series of three new adventures!

So what can we expect from Series 4? While showrunners Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss have given us the usual meaningless hyperbole, we do know that another confrontation with Andrew Scott's Moriarty is on the cards. In addition, Freeman hinted that, while Amanda Abbington will return as John's wife Mary, her days may be numbered – the series roughly follows the arc Arthur Conan Doyle set out for the characters, in which Watson ended up a widower.

The Christmas 2015 special will begin shooting next January, with the series following closely behind. Yes, we know it's a long way off, but they both have big Hollywood careers now! | KM

STAR WARS

Lucasfilm continued to impress this month by securing the services of yet another fan-favourite filmmaker for their saga following J.J. Abrams (*Episode VII*), Gareth Edwards (2016's first *Star Wars* standalone film) and Josh Trank (standalone #2). Step forward Rian Johnson, who will write and helm *Episode VIII*. For those unfamiliar with the director's work, he's celebrated (and rightly so) for his trio of eclectic self-penned features, *Brick*, *The Brothers Bloom*, and *Looper*, as well as his award-winning episodes of TV's *Breaking Bad*. While it currently has no announced director, Johnson will remain in Lucasfilm employ to then write the treatment for *Episode IX*.

Bringing things to the present and back to *Episode VII*, this month brought news of yet more additions to Abrams' 2015 release. First up to join the film was 21-year-old Billie Lourd, who has no acting credits to her name but just so happens to be the daughter of the returning Carrie Fisher. Joining Lourd in the franchise are relative unknowns Crystal Clarke and Pip Andersen. Clarke is an American actress with some stage and screen credits, currently studying in Glasgow, whereas Andersen is a 23-year-old English parkour expert who's expected to bring some practical physicality to some of the film's action sequences.

A month of *Star Wars* news wouldn't be complete without a bizarre rumour, and this month is no different, with speculation that Tom Cruise is to appear in a cameo role in *Episode VII*. The main reason for this tabloid-concocted speculation seems to be that *The Cruiser* was spotted meeting with Abrams in London, but considering the star was in town on *Edge of Tomorrow* promo duties and the pair go way back (Cruise gave J.J. his first feature with 2006's *Mission: Impossible III*), it's hardly the most unusual of sightings! Take this rumour with a massive pinch of salt and a glass of blue milk for now.

Despite the recent leg injury to Harrison Ford (watch out for falling Millennium Falcon doors, kids), *Episode VII* is still scheduled for a December 2015 release, despite widely rumoured pleases from Abrams and producer Kathleen Kennedy for it to be pushed back to May 4th, 2016. Given the surprise severity of Ford's unfortunate accident delaying his involvement by several months, perhaps the latter would be for the best... | AP

THE OUTER LIMITS

It looks like the *Sinister* writing team of Scott Derrickson and C. Robert Cargill are onboard to pen the script for the MGM's planned feature version of classic '60s TV show, *The Outer Limits*. Surprisingly, rather than adopting an anthology format, it seems the current plan is to remake the episode *Demon with the Glass Hand*, originally written by Harlan Ellison. In the TV version, a group of aliens from the Kyben race are hunting a man with no memory of anything beyond the previous ten days. Oh, and he's from the future and has a computerised hand which is missing three digits, and he must reattach them before he can find out what's going on.

MGM would no doubt love to be able to build a franchise around the series, which although not as famous as *The Twilight Zone* still has millions of fans and many genuinely brilliant episodes. No word yet on any projected release date or director, but no doubt, news will be forthcoming. | MU

THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

As the first of Marvel's Netflix-exclusive shows begins to move forward with some real intent, Matt Murdoch has seen (sorry, poor choice of words) some familiar characters added to *Daredevil*. The Charlie Cox-starrer has bagged its Big Bad, as *Full Metal Jacket* and *Jurassic World*'s Vincent D'Onofrio has been cast as Wilson Fisk, aka The Kingpin. *Daredevil*'s greatest fear was last seen played by Michael Clarke Duncan in 2003's underrated Affleck-starring movie. Luckily for the Guardian Devil, where there's a foe there's also a friend added to the mix, as *The Mighty Ducks* and *The Hunger Games*' Elden Henson has been brought on board to play Matt's long-time friend and legal partner, Foggy Nelson. Similarly, *Sin City*'s Rosario Dawson has also been confirmed to be a part of the show in a pivotal, albeit unknown, role. Early speculation has Dawson up for Elektra, although it's also been suggested that the actress could be playing Misty Knight, Maya Lopez, White Tiger, Karen Allen, Milla Donovan, Night Nurse or even a potentially brilliant turn as the always-unstable Typhoid Mary. In additional DD news, it's also been confirmed that *Luther* and *Doctor Who*'s Farren Blackburn will be directing at least one episode of the show's 13-episode run.

Moving away from Hell's Kitchen, there's been some happenings elsewhere in the Marvel Cinematic Universe. With 2015's *Avengers: Age of Ultron* shooting at the University of East Anglia, potential spoilers leaked when Anthony Mackie (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*'s Falcon) and B.J. Britt (*Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s Agent Triplett) were spotted on set and in full costume. As well as that particular pair appearing, the Iron Patriot armour, last seen donned by Don Cheadle's Rhodey in *Iron Man 3*, has also been spotted on set, prompting rumours that War Machine/Iron Patriot will be another name assisting Earth's Mightiest Heroes in their battle against Ultron. And it appears they'll need all the help they can get...

Yes, this month has seen the first details emerge on how *Avengers: Age of Ultron*'s climactic battle might play out. Now we won't spoil things too much for you, but it appears that the fight with Ultron could result in Mark Ruffalo's Bruce Banner stranded on a Quinjet that's heading into space. On a pre-programmed path and with no way to turn the jet around, Banner will have to wait for the flight to come to a natural stop... which is where things set up nicely for the practically already greenlit *Guardians of the Galaxy* sequel. When Banner finally does come to a halt, he'll wind up in the company of the Guardians, who will assist him in getting back to Earth. Thing is, this whole process grabs the attention of the Mad Titan, Thanos, which perfectly dovetails into *The Avengers 3*, where Thanos has been confirmed as going up against Marvel's finest. And who scoffed at the news that Marvel were ballsy enough to plan their cinematic world through 2020?

Speaking of Thanos, we know that Josh Brolin is signed on to voice the character from *Guardians of the Galaxy* and going forward. What we haven't heard is just who will be providing the physicality for the big bad. Now this may be purely coincidence, but it's also been recently confirmed by Andy Serkis that he is officially playing a role in *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. The motion-capture king has been tied to Joss Whedon's *Avengers Assemble* sequel for a while, but it was believed he was purely helping out Ruffalo with his Hulk performance. Despite Serkis confirming he is playing a role in *Age of Ultron*, he refused to be drawn on whether we'll actually be seeing his face or whether he'll just be mo-capping a character. In what could possibly be a case of 2 + 2 = 3, might he possibly be providing the body and performance to accompany Brolin's dulcet tones as Thanos? Even if this is the case and the Thanos gig is split, at least The Vision is going to be a one-man show. Yes, Paul Bettany will be providing both the voice and physicality for the character, albeit in a shiny metallic gold, red and green form. And even better, he'll reportedly be having his natty yellow cape as part of the outfit too! Ruffalo, Serkis, Brolin, Bettany et al can be seen in *Avengers: Age of Ultron* when it drops in the UK on April 24th, 2015.

Following on from last issue's troubling events surrounding the production of *Ant-Man*, the project now seems to be back on track, with Marvel Studios' president Kevin Feige letting slip that the character will become a key part of the Avengers team in the future. The movie has also since added David Dastmalchian (*Prisoners*; *The Dark Knight*) to its cast, but as is the case with the already-on-board Evangeline Lilly, Corey Stoll and Patrick Wilson, his exact role remains a mystery at the time of going to print. On that topic, mind,



If the likes of *Twilight* and seven years of increasingly crappy *True Blood* seasons haven't completely killed your appreciation of vampires yet, then Universal's new *Dracula* origin flick could very well be worth checking out this coming October.

rumour has it that Stoll will be playing the villainous Darren Cross, head of Cross Technological Enterprises, and that Wilson will play his cousin William Cross, who goes on to be Crossfire. Despite the deeply saddening departure of Edgar Wright in May, *Ant-Man* is still on track for a July 17th, 2015 release.

From Crossfire to Crossbones. Last seen as a smouldering mess at the end of *Captain America: The Winter Soldier*, it looks as if we'll be seeing more of Brock Rumlow down the line. Actor Frank Grillo has confirmed that he has a multi-picture deal with Marvel Studios and that he expects to be back in the future, hopefully in the already-confirmed *Captain America 3*. As Chris Evans has talked about how he's quitting acting once his Marvel commitments are up, and how Crossbones was effectively responsible for the death of Captain America in the comic books at one point, could it be that Steve Rogers may bite the big one in the next few years? After all, Sebastian Stan is only two movies in on a nine-picture deal and it is Bucky Barnes that steps into the Cap moniker once Rogers is "killed". Hmm...

Finally bringing our Marvel moment to a wrap, we're starting to get the first sight of movement on *Doctor Strange*. With Scott Derrickson already on board to direct, Jon Spaihts (*Prometheus*) is in advanced talks to pen the script for this Stephen Strange-centric movie. Marvel and Disney are looking to get the ball moving quickly on the Master of the Mystic Arts and it's expected that they'll announce their Doctor Strange in the next month or two. The current frontrunners for the titular role seem to be *Sherlock's* Benedict Cumberbatch, *The Dark Knight Rises'* Tom Hardy, and *Fight Club's* Jared Leto. Away from the lead role, Edgar Ramirez (*Domino*) is also said to be up for a part, possibly Strange's nemesis, Baron Mordo. Ramirez, who worked with director Derrickson on *Deliver Us from Evil* (out in August), has confirmed he's already held some form of talks to join the film. | AP



At last! The emergence of official **Mad Max: Fury Road** promo images like the one above can only mean one thing, George Miller's turbocharged pseudo-sequel is finally ready to roll out! Go see Tom Hardy's new look Max Rockatansky in cinemas from May 15th, 2015. Just don't tell Mel Gibson.

WARGAMES

MGM's remake of the cult 1983 Matthew Broderick movie **WarGames** hasn't made the news since June 2011, but it's back this month with what looks to be a new director at the helm. Reportedly replacing **The King of Kong: A Fistful of Quarters**' Seth Gordon will be Dean Israelite, whose found footage time-travel debut feature **Almanac, Welcome to Yesterday, Project Almanac** we've been waiting to see for what seems like forever. (It's currently scheduled for Jan 2015, over a year tardy.) If further proof MGM mean business, **WarGames 2.0** has also got a new screenwriter, with a fresh draft being penned by Arash Amel, he of the universally trashed **Grace of Monaco** (thankfully that one didn't fall in **STARBURST**'s remit!). Though news of yet another remake usually leaves us cold, perhaps this tale of a young computer hacker inadvertently triggering WWII could actually benefit from a twenty-first century makeover. And let's face it, however it turns out it'll do a lot more for the original's reputation than 2008's straight-to-DVD sequel **WarGames: The Dead Code**. Yep. That exists.

AMERICAN GODS

The long-gestating TV adaptation of Neil Gaiman's epic urban fantasy novel **American Gods** has taken another tentative step towards becoming a reality with the announcement that Bryan Fuller will be developing the show for premium US cable channel Starz (also the home of **Spartacus**; **Da Vinci's Demons** and **Black Sails**). The project previously existed in various states of development hell for over two years at HBO, before eventually being abandoned when the network's option on the book expired. Fuller, currently riding high on the success of **Hannibal**, has previous genre standing from creating cult favourites such as whimsical fantasies **Wonderfalls**, **Pushing Daisies** and black comedy **Dead Like Me**. Joining him in showrunning duties will be Michael Green (**Smallville**; **Heroes**; **Green Lantern**).

Much like Gaiman's seminal comic saga **Sandman**, in the world of **American Gods** every religion and every folklore tale is true, as are the supernatural entities that populate them who exist alongside one another without contradiction or paradox. Given life in America by the old world beliefs of the country's perpetual influx of immigrants, these gods are separate entities from those that still exist in the various motherlands, and can have altered personalities due to the difference of the American landscape and its people.

The novel's plot follows a mysterious and taciturn man named Shadow, who soon after his release from prison meets the enigmatic Mr Wednesday (America's aspect of chief Norse deity Odin, brought by the Vikings during their exploration to the continent around the turn of the 11th Century) and together they travel through the metaphorical and literal heart of America. Along the way they meet dozens of gods, such as Slavic darkness deity Czernobog and West African spider-man trickster Anansi, whose powers and presence are waning due to dwindling numbers of people believing in them,

and who Wednesday attempts to rally to his cause. A war continually threatens to break out between the old gods of dying cultures and the new gods of the information age, and if Wednesday cannot prevent it, he at least wants to gather enough support to be on the winning side.

Expect more news on **American Gods**' development over the next year... | AP

SONIC

Here's hoping it fares much better than 1993's **Super Mario Bros.**, but **Sonic the Hedgehog** has finally been confirmed to be heading to the big screen as rumoured, with Sony Pictures Entertainment/Columbia and Marza Animation Planet making the official announcement this month. The rapid blue hedgehog will be getting a movie that's part live-action, part CGI, and in terms of the approach, early reports suggests that it may look similar to the studio's **Smurfs** franchise. Again, here's hoping the film gives us something far better than those movies too. As for the plot of this feature, it's said that Sonic will once again go up against his long-time big-bad, Dr. Eggman (Dr. Robotnik for long-time fans out there). They'll also probably be a bit where he runs really fast. You heard it here first. | AP

MAGIC: THE GATHERING

Further to our first report regarding a potential **Magic: The Gathering** movie in development at 20th Century Fox, comes news of a new, very apt screenwriter joining the project. Working from an existing draft by the ridiculously ubiquitous Simon Kinberg (the **X-Men** franchise, **Star Wars Rebels**, at least one of the **Star Wars** standalones and **The Fantastic Four**), will be Bryan Cogman, who's no stranger to the fantasy genre after writing, producing and story editing a little show you might have heard of called **Game of Thrones**. Sadly there's no further news as to what the plot of **Magic: The Gathering** will focus on - you could even say Fox are keeping their cards close to their chest! [*I'd rather you didn't.* - Ed.]

AND FINALLY...

Universal Pictures are eyeing Mark Wahlberg to take the lead in their long-in-development **Six Million Dollar Man** reboot. The irony hasn't been lost on us that Marky Mark probably spends that much on hair product each year.

+++

Fancy spending **400 Days in Space** with Dane Cook? Neither do we quite frankly, but that doesn't mean his new sci-fi drama couldn't be one to watch. The story revolves around a pair of astronauts (**Superman Returns**' Brandon Routh being the other principal) stranded in the black after taking part in an experiment to test the psychological ramifications of watching **Good Luck Chuck** deep space travel.

+++

Despite the fact it was only last month we brought you news of **The Omen** being rebooted for TV, it now turns out that Platinum Dunes also plan to bring resurect Damien after having tried once before in 2006. Is **The Omen** our first re-re-reboot? This is getting silly now, guys.

+++

The sixth **Resident Evil** movie looks like it'll be getting the subtitle **The Final Chapter**. Anybody panicking that this spells the actual end of the series should take solace in the fact that **Friday the 13th: The Final Chapter** went on to spawn eight sequels, with another on its way next year.

+++

In more zombie-related news, Legendary Pictures plan to adapt popular videogame **Dead Rising** for TV, while our BBC Three will hole eight contestants up in a dead-infested mall for reality gameshow **I Survived a Zombie Apocalypse!**

+++

Cult sitcom **Community** might not feature zombies (well, yet anyway), but it certainly has the resilience of a Walker; having risen from the dead a second time to secure a miraculous sixth season on Yahoo!, who are about to set themselves up as a rival to streaming giants Netflix and Amazon Prime. (Okay, so that last segue was a bit of a stretch, but we had to get the good news in there somewhere.)

HTC 403 stories by ANDREW POLLARD, KRIS HEYS, MARTIN UNSWORTH, ANDREW MARSHALL and KIERON MOORE. Edited by KRIS HEYS.

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TURTLE RECALL

BY PETE TURNER

What better way to mark your 30th anniversary than with a big-budget Hollywood reboot! STARBURST sneaks back into the sewers to bring you the secrets behind...



You can't take the mutant out of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. If there is one thing that Michael Bay has learned in the two years since signing on to produce the TMNT remake, it's that fans do not like a man who messes with their mutants. He can transform and bastardise our beloved Transformers as much as he likes (we're over it now) but turning the adored awesome foursome into aliens from another planet is a step too far.

Never has a movie adaptation of an '80s comic book property been so scrutinised from the first announcement of its development. Anyone would think fans had been waiting for 30 years for a movie version of the heroes in a half shell adventures! However, the Turtles have already been on the big screen in an original live action trilogy of films (barreled out in rapid-fire succession between 1990 and 1993), a further fully computer generated sequel/reboot in 2007, and are now the subject of a Platinum Dunes produced reboot.

Yes, the same Platinum Dunes who butchered some of your favourite horror franchises with unnecessary remakes (Friday the 13th, The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, A Nightmare on Elm Street – to name just three) are now taking their sharpened knives to your favourite '80s kids TV show. It's been a tough couple of years for Turtle fans, with each new development being met with heartfelt outrage, a deeply held cynicism and a fair few shrugs of 'oh well I won't be seeing that then'. But spare a thought for ringmaster Michael Bay, whose every move has been

criticised since the day he announced his Turtles would be aliens. Since then, there has been some serious backtracking and it looks like the latest outing for the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles may just leave a few fans yelling 'Cowabunga' yet.

Let's not forget that Turtle fans are used to a little bit of disappointment and it's been at least 23 years since anyone could claim there has been a really decent attempt to bring Leonardo, Raphael, Michelangelo and Donatello to the big screen. While the computer generated 2007 version wasn't bad, it certainly couldn't hold a candle to the original live action film released in 1990 featuring Elias Koteas as hockey mask wearing Casey Jones and four men in heavy Jim Henson-created creature suits who somehow managed to make the characters convincing as spritely teenage ninjas.

In 2009, Viacom's Nickelodeon obtained all the rights to continue making Ninja Turtles products in the future.

Previously, all rights had been owned by one half of the original creative team Peter Laird and his Mirage Group as well as 4Kids Entertainment, but for the significant sum of \$60 million, Nickelodeon became the owners of all global intellectual property rights associated with the characters. Not wanting to waste any of that cool \$60 million they had shelled out for the rights, Nickelodeon soon got to making a new computer animated TV series, more merchandise than Donatello could wave a stick at and promptly announced plans for a new film.

Michael Bay's production company Platinum Dunes had been looking for a way to expand out of the genre and critical ghetto of their much-maligned horror remakes and with Bay's experience and huge box office success with the Transformers franchise, TMNT was a no-brainer. Paramount Pictures



had recently signed a first-look deal with Platinum Dunes and quickly came on board to distribute the film.

The family-friendly action adventure of TMNT may be new territory for Platinum Dunes but it certainly isn't for Michael Bay. However, Bay is definitely no writer and Paramount brought in Art Marcum and Matt Holloway to develop the script, costing close to \$1 million for the pair's efforts. However, after Josh Appelbaum and Andre Nemec retooled *Mission: Impossible - Ghost Protocol* for Paramount and boosted that franchise's box office success considerably, they were then brought in to work on the TMNT script. Clearly, this was not going to be an easy task. Kevin Eastman, the other of the original creators, suggested this would be a very different script than the one he had worked on back in 2009. That version, written by John Fusco, supposedly had a *Batman Begins* vibe that Eastman suggested was probably too edgy for what Paramount had been looking for.

The script went through many changes between 2009 and 2012 and soon after *Wrath of the Titans* director Jonathon Liebesman came on board was when the shit really hit the katana blade. Liebesman, who had previously dabbled in horror with *Darkness Falls* and *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Beginning*, and science fiction with *Battle: Los Angeles*, beat back competition from the likes of Brett Ratner but little did he realise his producer and boss Michael Bay was about to drop a bomb on the internet.

At Nickelodeon Upfront in March 2012, Bay delivered some impressive previsualisation material to the crowd. Now known as only Ninja Turtles, Bay promised the film would not only have the impact of a Transformers film but that there would be some significant changes to the mythology. Strutting around on stage, he announced seven words that caused fans to want to bury their heads beneath their shells and never come out until Bay was removed from the project. "These turtles are from an alien race" he said, as blasé as if he just declared the film would feature explosions. The internet went mental. "Teenage Alien Ninja Turtles?" they cried. One Reddit user asked "If they're aliens then why would they be ninjas?!"? They would have laser guns and lightsabers and junk! They wouldn't need to be ninjas! Michael Bay is the destroyer of worlds! Even the original voice of Michelangelo had a nunchaku to swing at Bay's reimagining. Robbie Rist came right out and said what fans were thinking: "You probably don't know me but I did some voice work on the first set of movies that you are starting to talk about sodomising... I know believing in mutated talking turtles is kinda silly to begin with but am I supposed to be led to believe there are ninjas from another planet? The rape of our childhood memories continues", "Sodomising... rape... sounds perhaps a bit harsh even in the age of internet trolls. Rist then retracted slightly, saying that "Everything I have said here could be off base and wrong... He has made WAY more money at this than I have."

Not one to pull back from a fight or curtail his own unwavering arrogance, Bay issued a statement that told fans to calm down. "Fans need to take a breath, and chill. They have not read the script. Our team is working closely with one of the original creators of Ninja Turtles to help expand and give a more complex backstory. Relax, we are including everything that made you become fans in the first place. We are just building a richer world." In his corner, Brian Tochi (the original voice of Leonardo) and Judith Hoag (April O'Neil in the 1990 film) came out to defend his vision. Hoag, who has worked on a number of Bay's films including *Armageddon*, said she is excited to see what Bay comes up with. Even co-creator Peter Laird advised fans to 'swallow the chill pill' on his own blog. He argued that 'it's possible that with enough truly creative brainpower applied to this idea, it might actually work. I'm not saying it's probable, or even somewhat likely... but it IS possible. However, as I have pondered this further, I have realised that in one way it IS truly a genius notion... the reason I say it could be a "genius" idea is that - for the first time - someone has come up with a way to have as many freakin' Turtles as they want.'





mean, if the TMNT are actually members of an alien race, there could be a whole PLANET of them!" Shudder.

While co-creator Kevin Eastman had earlier sold his share in the TMNT property to his partner Peter Laird, he now seems to be the most engaged with the new film. Eastman and Laird parted ways in a process that began in 2000 and was completed in 2008, but now that Laird and the Mirage group sold the property and Bay and Liebesman are set to make a new version, Eastman has come back into the fold. Eastman reckons that "what writers Appelbaum and Nemeć, director Liebesman, and producer Bay are doing... IS AWESOME. I'm officially on board". Liebesman assured fans that he was happy to see their passion for the property, but also tried to assuage them by playing up the Eastman connection by saying "I've just been locked in a room with Kevin Eastman. I think what we're developing, the fans will love. I'm a fan, and I love what we're doing. It's a lot of stuff Kevin's been thinking about for a long time and just hasn't done. Anything we expand will tie right into the mythology, so I think fans will go apeshit when they see it."

All this appeared to be a bit of clever backtracking to try and clean up the radioactive fallout from Michael Bay's comments. Liebesman attempted to call out the online fanboys who were up in arms about the alien issue. He reminded them that the TCRI canisters containing the ooze that first mutated the Turtles is actually of alien origin. However, he was also quick to sprinkle some seeds of doubt over exactly what Bay's words meant declaring that "we're sitting in a room now figuring everything out. So we don't know, but we are like Michael said: we're expanding it, and the expansion will be true to the mythology. I promise you: fans will love it". Corey Feldman who voiced Donatello in the original film jumped to Bay's defence and in a desperate bid to get attached to the new film, tweeted "Just heard this controversy over Michael Bays take on TMNT... My view is I've loved his remakes... I'm IN! LOL!" Sadly for him, his ploy fell through.

Fans were not just concerned about the alien addition to the story, but were also worried that due to the title being changed to Ninja Turtles, perhaps their favourite characters would not even be teenagers anymore. Bay eventually released a statement saying that Paramount has made the decision to change the title in order to simplify it. He confirmed that "yes they still act like teenagers. Everything you remember, why you liked the characters, is in the movie. This script is being developed by two very smart writers, with one of the original creators of Ninja Turtles. They care VERY MUCH about making this film for the fans. Everyone on this team cares about the fans. Just give them a chance. Jonathan, the director, is a major fan of the whole franchise. HE'S NOT GOING TO LET YOU DOWN."

That was March 2012 and suddenly in June many unhappy fans had their prayers answered. Production on the movie shut down and the release date was shifted back from Christmas 2013 to May 2014. Pre-production staff were laid off and rumours abounded that the script was being significantly reworked before they would begin shooting. Allegedly, Paramount were also hoping to get the budget down (perhaps a case of cold, webbed feet) but creator Kevin Eastman had another story for the delay, claiming that "Essentially they pushed it back for two reasons. One is the director, Jonathan Liebesman, wanted to make sure he could do the effects to the level he wants them at, and the fight scenes to the

way they should be. Also, their release date is almost exactly on the 30th [TMNT] anniversary. May 5, 1984 is when the first Turtles comic came out. May 16, 2014, is almost exactly 30 years after. So basically it's an anniversary movie now."

An early script was leaked in August 2012 titled The Blue Door and written by Appelbaum & Nemec. Villain Shredder was now Colonel Schrader, his Foot Clan were now a Black Ops unit called The Foot and the Turtles and their rat master Splinter were all aliens from another dimension. Worse still, Casey Jones and April O'Neil were a couple of teens with relationship troubles and Raphael replaced Michelangelo as the comic relief. Did they even read the comics/watch-the-TV-show/see-the-original-trilogy? Peter Laird hoped this was the rejected script that caused the production to be delayed, arguing on his blog that "If it is, in fact, the actual draft that was rejected and caused the production of the next TMNT movie to be pushed back to 2014 because the script was unsatisfactory, then I think all true TMNT fans should be grateful to the new 'powers that be' that they did not allow this wretched thing to go any further". In response, Bay confirmed that the leaked script was written before he was involved and that it "saw the shredder a long time ago". See what he did there?

Finally, in early 2013, it looked like casting had begun and production would soon be getting underway with a new, fully retooled script worked on by Evan Daugherty. Bay must have been in a burying the hatchet kind of mood as he announced that Megan Fox would be allowed 'back into the family' (after accusing him of being like Hitler in a magazine interview and then being fired from *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* at the alleged insistence of producer Steven Spielberg). Cast as April O'Neil after apologising to Bay, Peter Laird was again quick to criticise, saying "I think it is safe to say that there are probably hundreds of better choices for the role of April O'Neil. Of course, her name has promotional value, and maybe that's what they want." Relative unknowns Pete Ploszek, Alan Ritchson, Jeremy Howard and Noel Fisher stepped into the lycra leotards to motion capture the four Turtles and Danny Woodburn joined the cast as Master Splinter. With no sign of an actor being cast in the role of Casey Jones, the inclusion of Will Arnett got some speculating that he would be starring as the Turtles' masked vigilante buddy. However, set photos soon revealed that Arnett would actually be Vernon Fenwick, April's Channel 6 cameraman and sometime competitor.

Soon after production began, the Turtles got their nemesis in the form of William Fichtner, who confirmed he would be playing the evil Shredder, now known as Eric Sachs but soon to become the sharp armoured leader of the Foot Clan. Whoopi Goldberg also joined the cast as Bernadette Thompson who will be an updated version of Burne Thompson, the Channel 6 News editor and April's boss.

For the first time ever, the Turtles will be created through the kind of motion capture technology that has been so successful in films from *Lord of the Rings* to *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes*. The actors have been snapped in grey and black motion capture suits with giant turtle shells strapped to their backs. Production got underway in April 2013 with Eastman shooting a cameo in New York in August just before the film





wrapped. Reshoots continued in January with Megan Fox returning to the set soon after the birth of her baby, and then in April it was announced that Jackass extraordinaire Johnny Knoxville would be voicing Turtle leader Leonardo, and Tony Shalhoub (Monk) would be lending his larynx as the voice of Splinter. Pity the poor actors who sweated it out on set everyday hoping their voices might be used in the final movie!

As for the final script, little is known about how much of the original origin story has been kept and how many tweaks await to potentially sully our childhood memories. Some things can never change though, and it's a certainty that the Turtles will work alongside April O'Neil in an effort to take down the Shredder in a crime-ridden New York City. Lieberman claims that his movie is as much "a story about brotherhood and friendship and responsibility" as it is about fighting. However, in order to make those fight scenes as exciting as possible, he also name checked *The Raid: Redemption* as one of the films they are looking at for martial arts inspiration. In a potentially interesting twist on the mythology, preview footage reveals that Shredder and O'Neil's father are the men who were responsible for creating the Turtles as a way to fight crime. Bay himself confirmed that the Turtles will definitely not be aliens while Fichtner crushed some fan hopes that baddies Bebop and Rocksteady would make an appearance in the film. The most recent trailer even cleverly refers to the controversy surrounding the alien back-story with Arnett's Fenwick asking Fox's O'Neil, "So, they're aliens?" "No, that's stupid," she replies. This latest piece of marketing also alludes to the fact that Fichtner may not at first be playing Shredder, who is referred to as a robot samurai by Arnett's character. It also looks like Master Splinter will either be biting the dust, or at least getting his rat ass handed to him as the footage offers a glimpse of him buried under rubble. With the full title now finally reinstated to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and an IMAX release supported by some cool street art-inspired character posters, things are starting to look up for the Bay-produced reboot of the beloved franchise itself. After countless release date changes, the heroes in a half shell are finally heading back to the big screen. Grab a pizza and get ready to yell 'Cowabunga' like you're ten years old again. Three fingers crossed it's going to be radical!



TURTLE POWWOW! JEREMY HOWARD (DONATELLO)

WORDS: ANDREW POLLARD

STARBURST: How did you land the part of Donatello?

Jeremy Howard: Debra Zane, who had cast me in two films prior to *TMNT*, called me in to read for him out of the blue. It went well and I met with the director the next day. After that, I didn't hear anything for two weeks and I thought I was out of the running. Then a call came inviting me to a chemistry test with ten other guys, of which four would be Turtles in the end, and I went in to this mix and match session that lasted a good couple of hours. That's where I met Alan [Pitchon – Raphael], Pete [Ploszek – Leonardo], and Noel [Fisher – Michelangelo] for the first time, and within two months we were in New York shooting together.

Were you a fan of the Turtles when you were a kid?

Huge fan! I remember going to see the original *TMNT* in 1990 in the theatre and just being blown away. I became obsessed with *Turtles* from then on; I got all of the action figures and watched the cartoon religiously every Saturday morning. I would run around the apartment complex we lived in with a purple eye mask on and a broomstick doubling as a bo staff, hiding from pedestrians by darting into stairwells and tucking under benches, just having a blast pretending I was a ninja. It's funny to look back and

realise the irony in the selection of mask and weapon, because I don't even remember having a favourite Turtle!

What will we see here that's different to what we've seen before with the *Turtles* franchise?
 Well, obviously from the trailer, people can immediately see these Turtles look different than what they're used to. And a huge difference between this film and the earlier 1990s' films is the way you'll see them move now. Technology is at a place today where the Turtles can really fight and interact with their environs in a way that audiences haven't seen before in a live-action setting; the fight choreography in this movie is really going to blow people away. Before we started shooting, we saw an animatic of the snow chase sequence and I remember the shocked looks the four of us shared when it was over, realizing what a game-changer this movie was going to be for the TMNT world. And the Turtles are big! Donny is 6'9"! It suddenly becomes more credible that these mutated beings can actually keep a city safe because no one can really mess with them! And the way the Turtles can use technology to help them fight crime is certainly nothing ever seen before; Donny has every security camera feed in the city at his fingertips now. But certainly people are going to pay the most attention to how the Turtles look. When I first saw the new designs I was taken aback for a second because it was so new, but within seconds of studying them up close I was sold. The level of detail on these characters has never been seen before! I get that people have nostalgic feelings for the way they looked when Jim Henson did the puppeteer versions, and I'm included in that group, but don't knock the new look until you actually see the movie. The story plays into the look a great deal; these Turtles are outcasts, and that's a huge part of what makes them who they are, that struggle. They can't be

super cute at first glance, it wouldn't make any sense. And people will realise that soon enough. I remember, after the first trailer had just dropped, the FX guys from ILM were so glum at some of the online reaction to the Turtle faces. People don't realise the time and energy that go into how a film looks or how a character is animated. These guys at ILM are bigger Turtle fans than most people will ever be, and they've tried more versions of the final look than anyone will ever know. They want these Turtles to look awesome more than anyone. They've tried the big noses and they don't work, they just look ridiculous when they try and talk - it looks like a cartoon! It worked in 1990, but it just doesn't today, not when it's got to look real. And it's funny how the public reaction to the Turtles' new appearance mirrors exactly what the characters deal with in the film. They're mutants who aren't accepted by the world for how they look - you really have to love the irony! As soon as you spend two minutes with these characters, you realise what endearing and soulful beings they are, and you really grow to love them. People won't be thinking negatively about how they look after they see the film.

How was the dynamic with the other guys playing the Turtles?

The dynamic was great from day one. And I think that chemistry is what got us the parts. We really were brothers for that four-month shoot. There are stunning visuals in this movie, but at the end of the day people care about who these Turtles are and how they interact with one another. And getting those interactions right was very important to the four of us. But we never had to force it, the chemistry on set was evident to everyone involved, and I think that will really come across on screen. Or at least I hope it does anyway!

And how challenging was that motion capture side of the gig?

The only challenging part was really the prep time involved and the extra things you needed to do throughout the shooting day to facilitate the gear we had on. And we all knew to be patient with the time it took to rig the suits every day. As an actor, it's certainly an adjustment having someone come and change your battery pack out between takes while trying to absorb notes from the director or being fed new lines to try or having to unwire yourself from a hard drive if you wanted to step off set. But it just became routine after a while and part of the daily process. We had tiny HD cameras four inches from our faces, and you'd think that would be distracting, but after the initial fittings you don't even know they're there - until you try and eat food that is! The technology we used to capture facial expressions is basically what they used on Avatar but version 2.0. We had the same guy, Robbie Derry, who did that film, design and create the new system for this film. And you saw how amazing Avatar turned out! So to be the first film to use the next generation version of that tech is very exciting, and I

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think people are going to be incredibly impressed with the results. When an actor's chin scrunches, or brow furrows, or eye twitches, this facial capture rig catches all of it. And transferring that on to a CGI Turtle face and making it look good is certainly a huge challenge. But the results in the final film are incredible. The faces move so fluidly and realistically that people are going to think they're looking at real, living, breathing Turtles on screen!

Tony Shalhoub and Johnny Knoxville have been brought in to voice Splinter and Leonardo, respectively. Were you always going to be providing the vocals for Donny? Man, I still don't know if I am going to be the voice of Donny at the time of this interview! It certainly keeps me humble, but anything can happen and I can't rule out the possibility it won't be me in the end. Movies go through a lot of changes between shooting and release and this film is no exception.

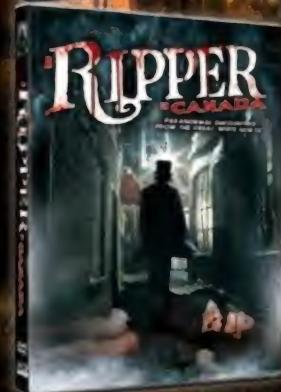
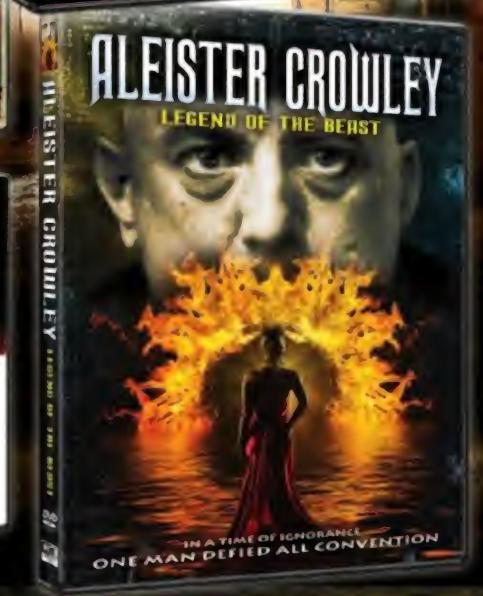
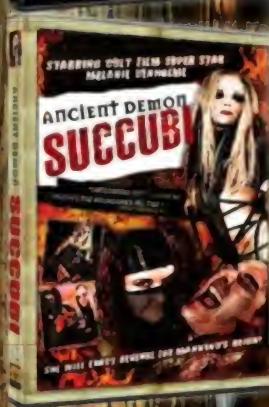
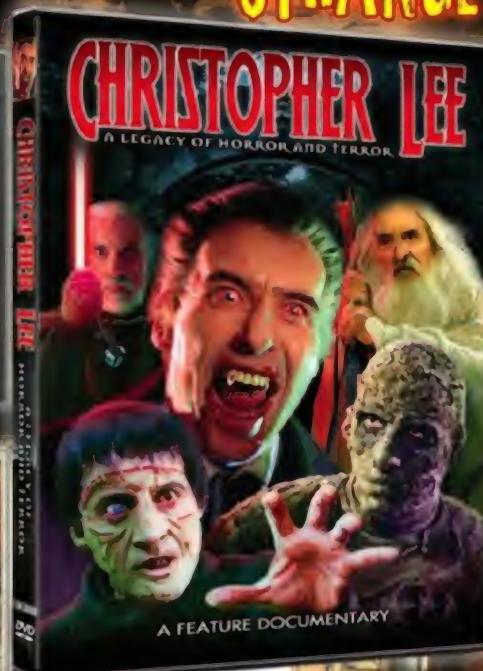
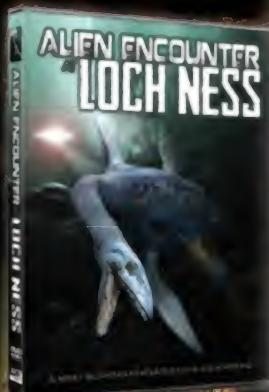
How would you feel if somebody had been brought in to replace you on vocals?
 Well I don't know that it won't happen yet, it could occur at the 11th hour. You get paid to do a job as an actor and you really aren't in control of what happens after that. It can be frustrating to not have a say in the outcome of a performance, but the reality of it is, that's the way this business works and you make peace with it. You do your best and then you can't worry about it beyond that.

Do you have a particular deal already in place to return for any sequel(s)?

We all signed three-picture deals and would be incredibly excited to come back and fulfill that. There is so much to explore with these characters, and to really get the chance to delve into what makes them tick and see more sides of who they are would be fantastic. This film just scratches the surface of their personalities, I think, and because you have four of them and a limited amount of screen time to establish what they're about, you're really left with an eagerness to know more and go on more adventures with these characters.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES
opens in UK cinemas this October.

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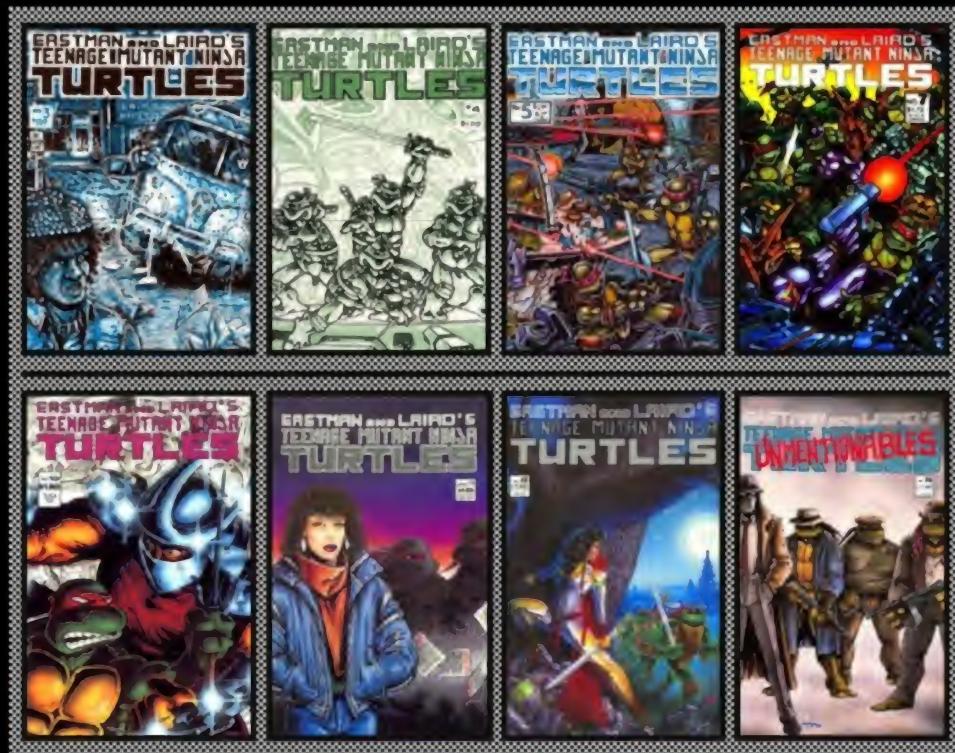


HEROES IN A HALFTONE



by Ed Fortune

Before the movies, before the toys, before the cartoons, before the TMNT-themed brassieres (see page 40)... there was, and always will be, the comic books. Join us as we go back to where it all began...



The story of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles comic book almost reads like the pitch for a feel-good movie. Young artists Kevin Eastman and Peter Laird were literally messing about when they came up with the idea. If you look at the first comic book story, it's clear that the entire thing was intended as a parody of Marvel's Daredevil, which was pretty hot back then thanks to the work of Frank Miller. The similarities are still part of the Turtle canon to this day; the canister of radioactive waste falling out of the back of a van is almost identical to Matt Murdock's own origin story. Daredevil fights ninjas called The Hand, the Turtles deal with ninjas from The Foot Clan. Finally, the Turtles' sensei is called Splinter, and Daredevil's mentor was known only as Stick!

Eastman and Laird felt that the joke was funny enough to share and borrowed some money from their relatives in order to set up a comic book publishing house. They named the company Mirage, because the idea that they could be hot-shot comic creators was an illusion. Mirage Studios was simply a table in a suburban kitchen. They printed just over 3000 copies of the first issue and put an advert in Comics Buyer's Guide Magazine. It sold out in a few weeks, and they reprinted it again, at 6000 copies. It sold out. That \$1.50 comic is now worth up to \$4000, but of course you'd never part with a piece of comics history like that, would you?

Despite the whole thing being a one-off project, comic stores were asking when issue two would be out. They got issue two done in time for January 1985 and sold 15,000 copies almost straight away. Distributors demanded another reprint of issue 1 and 30,000 copies seemed to do it. 50,000 people wanted issue 3, and the total distribution rose to 135,000 copies thanks to a guest appearance by Dave Sim's character Cerebus The Aardvark. The book was the number one cult hit of the '80s. The original Mirage Studios book ran from 1984 to 1995, with a total of 75 issues and assorted spin-offs. Running the studio (which had now become the huge enterprise Eastman and Laird once thought could only be an illusion) took much of their time and writing and art duties were handed to others. Industry greats who got their first starts with Mirage include Michael Dooney, Eric Talbot, Steve Lavigne, and Jim Lawson, with Eastman and Laird only coming together on rare special projects such as the City at War story arc. As early as 1989 the book was already flagging in popularity. Despite the Mirage Studios book keeping a fun yet gritty vibe, the teenaged fans had already begun to look elsewhere; the Turtles were no longer their sort of cool.

What changed was a merchandising deal; toy manufacturer Playmates saw big money in the Turtles, but changes had to be made in order to increase profits. By 1986, the changes to soften





the Turtles to a more kid-friendly property were already on their way and in 1988, child's comic producer Archie Comics had picked up the license to create the more kid-friendly turtles with the colour coded bandanas that many of us know from our pre-adolescent years. Shredder, who had been a psychopath in the Mirage comics, became a Skeletor-like buffoon. Other characters were utterly altered as to become totally unrecognisable. The Archie books weren't terrible but they were definitely aimed squarely at a much younger audience than the characters were before. This series ran from 1988 to 1995.

As Turtlemania began to fade and new fads were sought out to exploit children's pocket money, the Turtles found themselves looking for a new home. They found it with Image Comics. By now Laird and Eastman were pretty exhausted by the whole thing, and it showed. Image's violent and messy style suited the earlier incarnations of the Turtles quite well, but

by now the characters had changed so much that it simply didn't work. Image lost control of the rights in 2001 and these versions of the characters are universally ignored by the fans. Officially none of it is canon.

Eastman and Laird cashed out of the franchise by the early '00s, retaining some creative rights so they could still write about the characters if they wanted to. Laird has produced a handful of books since the '90s, but these days the two creatives let others have fun with their surprisingly popular heroes.

In 2003, Dreamwave Productions created a series of Turtles comic books meant to tie in with the 2003 cartoon series. In many ways it established the future of the franchise; it kept the gritty vibe of the original Mirage books and yet held onto the humour of the more child-focused stuff. It worked very well, but the book folded when the TV series did, making

it nothing more than a footnote in the history of the franchise.

Currently, our favourite green heroes are in the safe and reliable hands of IDW. Thanks to a spot of help from Kevin Eastman, IDW's take on the whole thing cherry picks all the good ideas created so far whilst still making it feel like a superhero book. Krang, a villain from the kids cartoon, has been turned into an intergalactic terror worthy of the name tyrant and a match for the likes of Marvel's Thanos or DC's Darkseid. Shredder is a true villain; a mix of psycho-killer, mystic nightmare and stone cold badass! Even some of the sillier excesses of the Archie comics (including a homage to *The Verminator*) is present here, but it all works, being just mature enough without being too serious, and silly without being stupid. After over 20 years of development, the Turtles have finally stepped past their parody origins into a true mythos in their own right. Cowabunga!

TOP TURTLE TALES

A selection of essential TMNT stories...

THE FUTURE SHARK TRILOGY

It's all too easy to have a go at the TMNT Adventures books. The Archie Comics version of the Turtles is very tame and lacks the distinct bite that the pre and post Turtlemania stories have. That doesn't mean they are all rubbish, however. The Future Shark Trilogy has it all - a dark dystopian alternate future, Rat-killing cyborg Vermimator X, Roswell aliens and Adolf Hitler's brain. Oh and sharks, of course. Silly and not at all serious, it's a good example of Archie getting it right.

RAPHAEL MICRO SERIES

Raphael has always been the cool lone wolf character of the four brothers so it makes sense that he was the first to get his own book. Mirage Studios produced a one-shot in 1985 featuring his adventures and most of it focuses on Raph's serious anger management problems. It also features the first appearance of the sporting goods-wielding vigilante Casey Jones. It's classic Turtles and a great example of the early period of the book.

THE CEREBUS THE AARDVARK CROSSOVER

Issue 8 of the original book featured a guest star who would go on to become one of the most significant comic book characters in the industry. The plot itself is nicely daft - a mysterious woman named Renet stumbles upon the Turtles and thanks to her stolen Time Scepter, the gang find themselves on a cross-dimensional caper which ensures that they cross paths with barbarian hero, Cerebus the Aardvark. Our gruff grey gangster pretty much assumes that the Turtles are idiots and saves the day. In addition to being a good story, it's also an interesting look at a crossroads in comic book history. Dave Sim's Cerebus the Aardvark eventually went in the opposite direction to the Turtles; whereas our green martial artists embraced commercialism and became one of the biggest fads of the '90s, Cerebus went on to become the sort of thing academics write serious journals about.

THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE FOOT CLAN

IDW's current run on the TMNT comic books has brought the series to a whole new level, effortlessly gathering years of weird ideas and blending them into one solid and coherent mythos. The Secret History of the Foot Clan is the perfect example of this, elevating the villain Shredder to the level of a world-class villain and putting him on the same footing as Darth Vader or Lord Voldemort! The tale neatly wraps Krang, Splinter and the vague eastern mysticism thing into one little bow. Those familiar with the Turtles who are looking to get back into the comics would be advised to start here; it reboots the franchise into something both fresh and familiar.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES #1

Okay, we'll be honest; the first ever issue isn't very good. The art isn't polished and neither Eastman nor Laird have much of an idea what they're doing when it comes to storytelling. The adventure is pretty rudimentary (the Turtles hit some people). However, it still works perfectly well as an introduction to the concept and despite the great many changes the characters have experienced, it still works as a starting point.



PALLADIUM TURTLES

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles was a cult hit before it became the mainstream monolith that most people know today, which meant that when it first launched, the only spin-offs it had were niche things. One of these quirky little add-ons was *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Other Strangeness*, a roleplaying game packed with art by Peter Laird and Kevin Eastman, featuring some original comic strips rarely seen elsewhere. These stories and artwork don't fit into any real continuity, they're designed to inspire young geeks to re-enact the Turtle's adventures. Laird went on to draw for several of the games' supplements and it's worth seeking out a copy of the post-apocalyptic book *After the Bomb* simply for Laird's drawings of mutant birds and motorbiking warthogs! Alas, the mainstream success of the Turtles did little for the RPG in the end; once their cult appeal faded no self-respecting fanboy wanted to be associated with the latest kiddy craze and the game waned in popularity, eventually being canned.

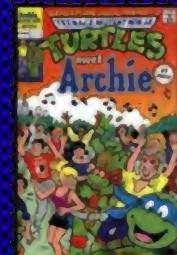


EMPTY SHELLS

Not every Turtles' comic book was an instant classic. After the craze hit, an awful lot of books were simply churned out, with comic strips being produced to promote all sorts of things. Here's a quick look at some of the ones we'd rather forget about...

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES MEET ARCHIE

Archie Comics produced the vast bulk of Turtle-related comic strips aimed at young kids throughout the '90s, and the publisher wasn't going to let the green guardians get away without meeting their main man, Archie Andrews! In *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Meet Archie*, our clueless heroes blunder in and are window-dressing for the most part, acting heroic when they need to, but as these are Turtles for children, much of the obvious humour is either blunted or simply not present. A similar crossover in which Archie met Marvel Comics' very own violent vigilante The Punisher was much better, so it's hard to excuse how disappointing this book is.



WARRIORS OF THE FORGOTTEN SEWER

...was a toy range produced in 1994 by Playmates. The Turtles have a long history of going on trans-dimensional crossover adventures, so it sort of made sense to make toys of the heroes in ren-fair costumes, though we're still confused as to why they thought putting Michelangelo in plate armour would ever make sense! The comic strip was designed to sell the figures and failed to do so because both the toys and the strip made no sense and looked awful, mostly because the creators made the mistake of assuming that children are stupid. Goofier than even the Archie comics, it hardly resembled anything even vaguely Turtle related. Brash, ugly and loud, the barely coherent story didn't help sell the not-terribly-nice toys and it was quickly consigned to the bargain bin.



CASEY JONES & RAPHAEL #1

On the other side of the coin, the *Casey Jones and Raphael* one-shot produced by Kevin Eastman was absolutely not for children. Eventually recycled into the equally gory book *Bodycount*, it's pretty much breasts, blood and beatings all the way through. The art duties are picked up by the amazing Simon Bisley and despite his work looking as pretty as it always has done, he does manage to make Raphael look dull; a neat trick when you consider that the Turtles are pretty unique in their design. This is the closest the franchise has gotten to an exploitation/horror movie style version of the franchise, and we can only be thankful that it flopped.



MUSCLE AND FAITH

Relative obscurity has not saved this book from its totally deserved reputation as one of the worst things to ever be associated with TMNT. A black and white work produced by Flying Colors Comics, this began life as a fan work until Kevin Eastman gave it his 'official blessing'. Written and drawn by Jeff "J.B." Bonivert, the art is blunt, nasty and crude. Bonivert also can't seem to draw a convincing Turtle, so relies on Casey Jones to carry the story. The result is a tedious tale of vigilante justice in an urban hellhole. *Muscle and Faith*'s only saving grace is that it's available for free on the internet!



THE LAST OF THE VIKING HEROES SUMMER SPECIAL #2

Before TMNT truly sold out, Eastman and Laird were quite happy to pimp their characters to any indie comic book that would have them. *The Last of the Viking Heroes* was a very short-lived example of this, a cliché-ridden series of frat-boy style gags set in a generic fantasy world. The Turtles tie-in is nothing of the sort; despite a cover promising full-on ninja action what we actually get is a dull cop-out in which one of the existing cast drinks a magic potion, grabs some oriental weapons and then goes forth and kicks ass.



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THE SENSEI

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

KEVIN EASTMAN originated the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES with his creative partner Peter Laird way back in '80s. Since then he's become one the stalwart figures of the comic book industry and his credits include HEAVY METAL magazine and adventurous, creator-owned graphic novel company TUNDRA PUBLISHING. Recently he's consulted on this year's cinematic reboot, and is one the creators behind IDW's acclaimed new Turtle series. We caught up with the comic book legend to talk TMNT and more...

STARBURST: Back in 1984, did you ever imagine the Turtles would get so big?
Kevin Eastman: My goodness, no! Both Peter and I were huge comic book fans as kids. It was just a fantasy back in those days that we could do the thing we love and draw comic books for a living. I think our parents were more worried that we would end up

living in their basement for the rest of our lives. It was a dream of ours and we weren't going to let anything stand in our way. When we did the first issue we really didn't expect to sell a single copy and here we are thirty years later still drawing Turtles, still talking about Turtles and the fans have supported

it all these years; it's literally mind-blowing, it's really hard to digest at times.

If you could go back in time and give yourself one bit of advice what would it be?
 Not much. One way or another I would have worked in comics. We were following a dream and I think that from a very young age I was reading or drawing comic books; Jack Kirby was such a huge inspiration to me. It's all I ever wanted to do. All those years before the Turtles I was writing stories and doing illustrations, drawing my own comic stories, things like that. Other kids would be out playing and I'd be

up in my room reading and drawing. I just stuck with it. It was almost as if I didn't have a choice; it's something I'm very passionate about. The worlds collided and it was a perfect storm when I met Peter Laird. Us meeting and the creation of the Turtles, it feels more like destiny. Or a piece of dumb luck! We got so lucky with the Turtles, it was such a huge blessing.

Issue one of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* reads like a *Daredevil* parody. Why is that?
Daredevil was one of my favourite comic books as a kid. I read lots of different kinds of comics, but the superheroes I gravitated toward were the more 'realistic'. I could relate to it a bit more, even putting it in the context of a blind superhero who was more physically trained than most and didn't have blatant super powers; he was just a lawyer / detective and trained athlete. Unlike something more fantastical like Superman. I was reading *Daredevil* from very early on and I remember it very clearly when Frank Miller came on board in issue 158. I just watched this new artist and thought, 'Wow, he's pretty good' and then over the next 30 issues he took comics in general to a whole new level. I guess when we did our parody we didn't really think that many people would be seeing it; we wrote it specifically for ourselves! We took some of our favourite themes such as the superhero group from X-Men/Avengers / *Fantastic Four*. Mutants were very popular at the time and we mixed in our favourite bits of *Daredevil* and also Dave Sims' *Cerebus the Aardvark*. Even the cover and the panel borders have elements of parody. We picked all of our favourite bits, put them all in a blender and out came the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*. To say it all out loud always sounds funny to me!

You've been responsible for creating or managing some pretty major names in comics. What has it been like to go from *Mirage* to IDW via the likes of *Heavy Metal* and *Tundra Publishing*?
 In the early days it was just Peter and I writing and drawing the stories for ourselves and we were lucky that the



fans gravitated towards them and gave us an incredible job. Over the years we went through all the different forms of the Turtles. We worked on the animated shows, the movies, we had approval over much of that stuff. Just about anything the world saw with a Turtle on it we saw it first or approved it or worked on it and or developed it. That has now stretched over thirty years. I used some of the success I had with the Turtles financially to buy *Heavy Metal* magazine, which was a huge inspiration to me when I was a kid. It exposed me to the more underground and edgier US and European artists. When I had the chance to buy *Heavy Metal* I jumped on it and I'm still publishing it today. With Tundra Publishing, I always like to say that so many people in the publishing industry today stand on the shoulders of giants and we're all in it because we were inspired by the likes of Wally Wood, Steve Ditko and Jack Kirby. So many of them didn't even have say, control or profit from the characters they created. Tundra was to be the Apple Records of comics and my original thought was to hope that it wouldn't end the way that Apple ended, but it inevitably did. We just couldn't find the market for the creator-owned work we produced. All those things are life lessons I don't regret. Three years ago when IDW picked up the rights to do [TMNT], Ted Adams, a long time friend, invited me to see what they were doing and I just became so enamoured with Tom Waltz's work on the series. He sort of picked his favourite parts of the many Turtle incarnations and rolled them all into a new foundation of the universe. The tone was edgy enough for the older fans but fully supported by Nickelodeon.

So what's it like to work on the Turtles again? It's fantastic, I'm having almost as much fun as I did back when it was just Peter and I. Nothing can compare to that, but this is fun. If you look at the IDW comic series and compare it to what Nickelodeon did with the animated series, the guys behind that grew up with the Turtles. They consumed all those universes we created; they are extremely knowledgeable fans who have reshaped it by putting into it the things that they love. They call me Obi Wan Kenobi over there! [Laughs.] At IDW we do fairly regular brainstorming sessions and I always get to do something new in the Turtle mythos. It's a nice playground they let me have. I truly love working with creative people and that goes back to the bond Peter and I share being big geeks. We built our Turtle universe by putting the things that we love into it, so it's come full circle.

We really like what IDW have done with the franchise.

What were the challenges with reimagining the Turtles from the origin onwards?

Here we are 30 years later with the Turtles and it gives me goosebumps that people still love it. When you're creating your own little path into very well known characters, it's very dangerous ground because you have this fear of treading on someone's childhood memories. We were pretty worried about the fans and hoped that they'd accept all the changes like Old Hob and Raphael being separated and the lab and so on. But everyone has come along for the ride. You guys are all back and we've gained a bunch of new fans. And I get to keep my old job. [Laughs.]

Where did Bebop and Rocksteady come from, and how hard was it to put them in the new comic books?

It was kind of based on a number of things that we were doing when developing the cartoon show. We'd done roleplaying games with Palladium books and for that we expanded on the various kinds of mutants, because you need that in roleplaying games. We had some wild boar, warthogs, rhinoceros and hedgehogs and so on. So when it came to developing the cartoon show we had a couple of sessions with Playmates Toys and the animators, and they came out of that. They were sillier than we'd have liked them to be and we did some pretty stupid stuff with them. For the IDW series we got to redesign them, but they're still pretty stupid, but also cagey knuckleheads. They're dangerous, but they're complete idiots.

Roleplaying games are back in a big way now, any chance we'll see a Turtles game again?
You see these huge gaming rooms in comic stores these days, it seems like the audience is growing for that. That's so cool. There's the opportunity to do something good there. If Nickelodeon do something with that I'd be way down with it. It would be awesome.

Upcoming Turtle collections from IDW Publishing include TMNT: UTROM EMPIRE, released July 29th (turn to page 97 for our review), and EASTMAN & LAIRD'S TMNT COLOR CLASSICS: THE WORKS (VOL. 3) on September 2nd.



GO NINJA, GO NINJA, GO!

A TMNT
MOVIE
RETROSPECTIVE

BY KAL SHANAHAN



When Michael Bay made those incendiary "alien origin" comments back in 2012, the general consensus amongst fans was that the filmmaker was misinterpreting the spirit of the franchise and injecting too much of himself, perhaps even a little *Transformia*, into the concept. But did the TMNT movie franchise *really* deserve to be held in such high regard? Was the fan community right to be angered by such tweaks (many of which were subsequently reverted anyway), or was there nothing to sully in the first place? Let's face it, the '90s wasn't a decade particularly known for its quality output, spawning such gems as *Super Mario Bros.*, *Lost in Space* and some George Clooney/Arnold Schwarzenegger aberration that is best left unmentioned. These were movies that, although fun for an eight year old, have aged worse than Edward Furlong. So, what about those heroes in a half-shell?

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (1990)

Dir: Steve Barron

Starring: Brian Tochi, Robbie Rist, Corey Feldman, Josh Pais, Judith Hoag, Elias Koteas, James Saito

It all starts in North Carolina in the summer of 1989. Steve Barron, an

untested director begins filming what is to become the second highest grossing independent movie of the time – the first feature film adaptation of the TMNT comics, and wildly popular '87 cartoon series. Filmed on a \$13.5m budget, or the Thursday night opening gross of *Star Trek Into Darkness*, the producers tasked Jim Henson's Creature Shop with capturing the look and attitude of the Turtles. Though at the time their comic book counter parts were 3-4ft tall, the decision to use a mixture of costumes and animatronics, suits that Henson would later call "the most advanced I've ever worked with", meant that the Turtles now cut much more menacing silhouettes, each standing 6ft tall. Conversely, it took three separate puppeteers to control Splinter.

The movie, which opened in the UK November 1990, re-told the origins of the Renaissancian Reptiles and chronicled their early meetings with mainstays of the universe; April O'Neill, The Shredder, The Foot Clan, and everyone's favourite Wayne-Gretsky-on-steroids, Casey Jones. Also, bonus points for spotting young Sam Rockwell.

New York City is experiencing the worst crime wave in recent history, and when the NYPD prove unable to deal with The Foot Clan, four mutant teenage vigilantes arise from the sewers to protect the city.

As the Turtles do battle for the soul of NYC, they draw out the Clan's leader – the aluminium themed Shredder, himself intrinsically tied to the origins of the Turtles and their master Splinter. Though the plot is taken mostly from the darker and more grizzled comic book arcs of the mid-'80s, the film also draws influence from the 1987 cartoon which aired simultaneously – such as their pop-culture filled jovial banter.

The movie did spectacularly well at the box office, earning over \$200m worldwide (or 15 times its budget), even if it didn't gel particularly well with critics. Merchandising for the film was sparse, as rights-holders Playmates Toys expressed concern that the film was too dark and violent, sentiments later echoed by concerned parents and even Jim Henson himself. What Barron, and his screenwriters Bobby Herbeck and Todd W. Langen were able to achieve, was bringing the franchise to the forefront of popular culture. Children wanted to see their favourite cartoon on the big screen, whilst an aggressive marketing campaign (especially the product placement with Domino's) meant that there were few adults who were unaware of the release date. If the 1989 summer release of Tim Burton's *Batman* had taught Hollywood that a "kid's" franchise could make the transition to mature film given the correct care and attention – the 1990 *TMNT* movie proved that you could keep your wildly immature humour and still make a boatload of cash.

The *TMNT* movie franchise was off to a fantastically profitable and creatively promising beginning.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES II: THE SECRET OF THE OOZE (1991)

Dir: Michael Pressman

Starring: Brian Tochi, Robbie Rist, Adam Carl, Laurie Faso, Paige Turco, Kevin Clash, David Warner

The resounding success of the first movie put *TMNT* II on a nitrous-fuelled fast track, the speed of which even Vin Diesel would be impressed by. Barron was replaced by director Michael Pressman, who stepped in to helm the much anticipated sequel from an original co-screenwriter Todd W. Langen script – although this time with a budget doubled in size. Jim Henson's Creature Shop also returned to the franchise, eager to work with a larger cast of characters and under a bigger budget – consequently, *TMNT* II ended up as Jim Henson's last, and the first film released after his death to be dedicated to his memory.

Following closely on from the events of the first film, *TMNT* II presents the Turtles in high spirits





TURTLE POWWOW! KENN SCOTT (RAPHAEL)

STARBURST: How did you first get involved with the franchise?

Kenn Scott: That's an interesting story. *Teenage Mutant Ninja*

Turtles was shot in North Carolina where I grew up. Ever since I was a kid I wanted to be an action hero in the movies. One day, I wanted to sneak into the movie studio. I got myself a pizza delivery uniform, drove up to the security gate and said, "Hey, I've got a couple of pizzas here for production". The guard pointed and said, "Okay, drive here, turn left and park there. They're all in the back lot." So I drove past, went onto the lot, took off my uniform, walked around the corner and found myself on the back lot of the studio watching them shoot some low-budget action film. I was in heaven!

So you became a Ninja Turtle by delivering pizzas?!

That's how it started, yes! Through doing this I met the people who were in charge of casting the extras and one thing led to another; they learned I was a martial artist and said I should audition for the Foot Soldiers. I showed up at the audition, we all had to do our martial arts katas, we had to act like we were getting beaten up and we even had to say a couple of lines. By the time

I got home there was a message on my answering machine: I got hired to be a Foot Soldier for \$75 a day. Then the stunt double for Raphael needed to perform a scene where Casey Jones hits him with a cricket bat, sending Raphael flying. When they dropped this poor guy headfirst into a trash can, the Turtle head came down very quickly and broke his nose. For the first time in my life, being 5 foot six and a half paid off and I became the stunt double for Raphael!

So how did you end up becoming the voice and body of Raphael in the second movie?

When the second movie rolled around, I became aware that the voice actor Josh Pais was not returning. I called the producers and said, "Hey I would really like to be an actor". They asked me to send them a videotape of myself playing Raphael's scenes overnight. It was Memorial Day, so all the overnight places were closed. So I went to the airport and said, "My dreams are dependent on this tape" and they said that they could do it, but it was going to cost \$150. That was a lot of money but they got it there. A couple of days later, I got the call to fly out to London, go to Jim Henson's creature shop and get a new suit made, because I was the new Raphael.

How difficult is it to perform martial arts in a Turtle costume? The costumes weigh 30 to 40lbs. You're limited in your range of motion and in your vision. You have to limit the amount of time you can have in the suit, and you have to really practice the moves, almost relearning every kata because you can't rely on your sight. It's like trying to do Kung Fu in a space suit!

Words: Ed Fortune



after defeating Shredder, more care free and flippant than they have ever been. After the opening scene sees the Turtles save and then befriend a young pizza delivery boy (played by TMNT Donatello actor Ernie Reyes Jr), debate arises within the group as to their future, and how to best consolidate their natural teenage curiosity with their stoic ninja training.

This dilemma is further compounded when the mysterious Ooze, the catalyst of the Turtle's original mutation, makes an appearance in New York. The brothers go to investigate, eager to learn more about their origins, but arrive just as the new Foot Clan escape with the canister – and when Professor Jordan Perry, the scientist working on the project is abducted, the Turtles fear the worst. The film also introduced the non-canonical characters Rahzar and Tokka, who were somewhat cynically based on Bebop and Rocksteady as to circumvent Intellectual Property laws; an ooze-infused wolf and snapping turtle, both with infantile minds. Throw in the kidnapping of Splinter and the return of The Shredder, and the stage is set for an exciting TMNT II climax.

The huge success of the first film put even more pressure on the TMNT II producers to bow down to external pressures and make the sequel more 'kid friendly', bringing it more in line with the cartoon which was at its height of popularity. Though these motivations infamously led to the Turtles not being able to use their weapons on or off screen for the duration of the film, they did manoeuvre the movie to be more in line with the studio's marketing and merchandising agendas. TMNT II ended up generating a little under



\$79m in box office sales, on just a \$25m budget.

The franchise at this point had proven that it had legs. Mutated rat legs that need to be assisted with a comically rickety cane sure, but legs still. A proven formula with a decade of source material, chemistry between the characters and a fanbase clamouring for more - it would take an enormous creative misfire to mess it up.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES III (1993)

Dir: Stuart Gillard

Starring: Brian Tochi, Robbie Rist, Corey Feldman, Tim Kelleher, Paige Turco, James Murray, Elias Koteas,

What's that? A creative misfire you say? This time, there was a two-year gap between the releases of TMNT II and III, which on the outset would appear to be a good thing. TMNT II was rushed, undoubtedly to capitalise on the popularity of the cartoon and of the original - a film that was never expected to make money in the first place. The sequel had a boatload more problems than its predecessor, but for the most part it came away unscathed - it progressed the plot and identity of the players, it made money at the box office, and it proved to be a merchandising juggernaut.

Surely then, given an extra year of production, TMNT III would be the gem to solidify that TMNT movie franchise - to turn it into the most ninja conglomerate in Hollywood.

Well, a gem it was not. Right from the get-go TMNT III (sometimes erroneously identified as TMNT: Turtles in Time) is misfiring on all cylinders; an opening in feudal

Japan without a Turtle in sight, an introductory Ninja-ZZ Top-conga line, Turtles with liver spots - all of which should have been giant red flags. The distinguishably different look for the film (samurai armour aside) was because TMNT III marked the first live action Turtles film the Jim Henson Creature Shop did not work on. Again, red flags all around.

The 'plot' for the second sequel sees the Turtles come into possession of the Time Scepter (an artefact usually associated with Turtles villain Lord Simultaneous), and when, perhaps through happenstance, it is activated, April O'Neil is accidentally transported back to Japan 1603. With Donatello's calculations that the space-time continuum will right itself within 60 hours, the Turtles hurry to the past to rescue April and return her to the present.

And so the rest of the movie plays out exactly how you think it would; like a TV movie of the week. The film, scripted by writer/director Stuart Gillard, is plagued by goofy dialogue, desperate acting, and suffers a sharp decline in animatronics. Critics slated the film, citing the absence of any major villains and the see-through gimmicky plot, and accused the film of wringing the last creative ounce out of the franchise.

Regardless, TMNT III opened number one at the box office in the Summer of 1993 and went on to bring in \$42m worldwide (just £523,000 in the UK) on a budget of \$21m. A fourth film, tentatively titled TMNT: The Next Mutation, was scrapped almost immediately.

And it did take a little time for the TMNT franchise to recover.





he is, but I do share his zest for life and his love of adventure. He's also quite a clown and I think most people who know me would say the same about me. Just ask my daughter!

Are you surprised by the longevity of the Turtles franchise? Did anyone really think it would last thirty years? I don't think anyone can predict the future, much less how successful - or not - a film will be. However, the Turtles are somewhat iconic characters many people can relate to, so maybe it's not such a surprise.

The Turtles have been captured in many mediums – comics, film, toys etc. – but which do you prefer? I don't think anything surpasses the film versions.

Prosthetics are never easy; how long did it take you to get into the Mikey costume? Once my dresser and I found a system, we got it down to about 45 minutes. It took quite a bit longer at first though.

Are there any other ass-kicking superheroes you'd like a go at? I think I'd rather like a go at a super villain like Dr Sivana. I mean, who wouldn't want to say the catchphrase, "Curses, foiled again"!

Any upcoming projects?

Life is busy. I work here in Toronto on TV, film and voice projects as well as teaching part time at Seneca College. You can check me out on Bite.ca in *Papillon*, a web series with *Kids in the Hall's* Kevin McDonald. Also lately I've been a set dad for my 12-year-old daughter Zoë, who is finishing up her first lead role in a film called *Bark Ranger*. Coincidentally, she appeared in a short film called *The Last Halloween* that *STARBURST* recently covered. Small world!

Words: Dominic Cuthbert

TURTLE POWWOW!

DAVID FRASER (MICHELANGELO)

STARBURST: Were you a Turtle fan before starring in *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles III*?

David Fraser: Yes I was. I'd seen the first movie and loved it. I watched the second film after getting the part and enjoyed it as well.

We're guessing Michelangelo, but who was your favourite Turtle?

No question, Mikey all the way! I was thrilled when I learned that they were thinking of me for Mikey, but all the Turtles are great.

Did you have any reservations about playing a hero in a half shell?

None whatsoever. It was an incredible experience. I had no idea how complicated these films were to make. Not only was it an amazing acting experience but it was a real eye opener into the world of filmmaking itself.

Mikey, more so than the others, is quintessentially an eighties character, do you feel he's still relevant and engaging to today's audiences?

Yes I do. As a matter of fact the students I teach – I'm a part time professor in the Acting Department at Seneca College - some of whom were born after the film was made, still love the movies and are especially fond of Mikey.

Be honest, are there any similarities between you and party dude Mikey? I don't think I'm quite as reckless as



TMNT

(2007)

Dir: Kevin Munroe

Starring: Nolan North, James Arnold Taylor, Mikey Kelley, Mitchel Whitfield, Chris Evans, Sarah Michelle Gellar, Patrick Stewart

It took 14 years and the renaissance of the comic book movement to convince studios that the time was right for the Turtles to return. Peter Laird, co-creator of TMNT, put the then *Mirage Studios*-owned comic book, simply titled 'TMNT', on an indefinite hiatus – so that he himself could oversee production on the new movie.

Though more care was being given to the 2007 treatment than *Casey Jones'* hair, studios could not forget the negative correlation the movie franchise seemed to be heading in; for all the rising costs of the live action movies, box office gross had steadily decreased. It was part budget control, part stylistic choice then, when Warner Bros announced in 2000 that a fully CGI TMNT movie was in development, with Hong Kong director John Woo in discussions to direct.

It stalled, as these things tend to do, and Woo, who up to that point had never worked on an exclusively CGI film, left the project. WB then hired writer/director Kevin Munroe, an unproven option in the captain's chair certainly, but a more well-rounded talent,





versed in animation and conceptual design. Though originally thought to exist in the same universe as the '90s trilogy, Laird himself stated that the new TMNT would exist in its own universe. This despite the fact that the film's plot fits chronologically, and it makes numerous references to previous franchise instalments; Shredder's helmet, Ooze, and the Time Scepter are all visible trophies in the Turtles' lair. That said, the movie deviates wildly in tone from the rest of the franchise – it's tough and cynical world is much more in line with the comic book.

The movie opens once again in a post-Shredder world, with the Turtles splitting after their defeat of the Foot Clan. They have each gone their separate ways, in search of themselves; Leonardo is training in Central America, Donatello is working IT support (what else), Michelangelo is working as a clown and Raphael has turned into the loose-cannon vigilante Nightwatcher. But when an assignment facilitates April and Leo's paths crossing, she inadvertently starts a chain of events that threatens to bring immortal warriors from a parallel universe to New York City, which in turn forces the Turtles back together. April and Casey Jones play a much larger role in this incarnation, which is reflected in the

casting of Sarah Michelle Gellar and Chris Evans.

TMNT presents a much more aggressive Turtles team, full of hostility and in-fighting – gone is the whimsy of the cartoon and the flippant rapport between the four brothers, which is in itself a reflection of the times. The loss of the pop-culture references and more childlike innocence was noticed by fans and audiences alike, who felt that the movie had gone too far in trying to distance itself from its predecessors.

Still, this new generation of Turtles for the new generation of fans proved to be a wildly commercial success, grossing \$95m worldwide from a \$34m budget. The release coincided with a plethora of merchandising – from toys and comics to video games. The Turtles were back and had laid stake from sewer to skyscraper!

In conclusion, the history of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle movie franchise has been anything but (rock)steady. The first film

captivated the hysteria and energy of the late 1980s and channelled it into an unexpected if not middling property with the most ardent of fanbases,

which in turn transformed it into a runaway hit. And whilst TMNT II meddled with the formula a little, there was enough goodwill left from the first that it was able to capture some of that same magic. So if TMNT III was a bo staff to the knee, TMNT III was a katana in the eye.

The Turtles have since gained traction in the years following the release of TMNT. Though the movie wasn't the perfect adaptation many were waiting for, it brought the CGI format to the forefront of the franchise and helped paved the way for new iterations of the characters. The last dark and broody TMNT adaptation will undoubtedly have the largest influence on the next, though perhaps it is time for an altogether fresh take. Objectively, fans will agree that not one of the adaptations so far have truly captured the essence of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles yet – and if Michael Bay can bring the attention he brought to the Transformers, whilst leaving the directorial duties in the more than capable hands of Jonathan Liebesman, we might just be able to get our shells shocked!





TMNTV

by Stuart Mulrain

Tune in as we take a look at the various incarnations of the world's most famous fighting team on the small screen, from the 1987 show that sent the heroes supernova, to Nickelodeon's acclaimed revival...



10 Seasons / 1987-1996

Like a lot of the cartoons of the 1980s, *Teenage Mutant Ninja* (or *Hero* if you were in the UK) *Turtles* began life as a way of selling toys! After approaching Playmate Toys about producing a line of figures based on the comic, Playmate said they would be interested, but only if there was a TV series deal in place first. And so a five-episode mini-series was produced and made by Fred Wolf Films (known as Murakami-Wolf-Swenson at the time) and IDDH that saw the toys go into production and TurtleMania sweep the world.

The series had very little in common with Eastman & Laird's original comics, instead opting for a lighter, more slapstick approach to the characters rather than the dark, nourish tone of the comic (it had to appeal to the children and sell some toys after all). The series took very little in the way of story cues from the comics either, instead creating its own mythology, style and continuity, largely playing out on a brightly coloured palette.

Alterations were made to the characters that were brought over from the comics, with all of them being played much more broadly and light-heartedly than in the source material. Aside from the tone, the most notable changes included Splinter's origin being changed to a man who is mutated into rat (instead of a rat mutated into a bigger rat), April's job being changed from a lab assistant to a TV reporter and Baxter Stockman being changed from an African/American to a timid white man (and later a fly).

Although several of the changes made for the series have been used again in

both the films and later TV series, one major alteration that's been used in every incarnation since was the different coloured eye masks each of the Turtles wore. This (along with the initials on their belt buckle) was done to make the characters more individual, so that viewers could tell them apart.

The series also created new characters including Krang (who was loosely based on the alien race the Utroms from the comic) and mutant bad guys BeBop (a warthog) and Rocksteady (a rhino) who provided more comedy than actual threat. The series also had Stan Sakai's ninja rabbit Miyamoto Usagi as a guest character in a few episodes (the comics had crossed over in the past as well), although they chose to name the character Usagi Yojimbo (the comic in which Usagi appears) instead.

It's fair to say that the series was in its heyday in the first 5 or 6 seasons, with most of the iconic stuff that you remember happening in those early episodes. James Avery (yes, Uncle Phil from *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*) as Shredder, that classic theme tune by Chuck Lorre (yes, he of *Two & A Half Men* and *The Big Bang*

Theory fame) and that genuinely terrifying moment alluded to earlier where Baxter Stockman is turned into a fly.

Although the series made some minor changes for Season 5 - which saw the use of a darker colour palette that gave its backgrounds more of a *Batman: The Animated Series* vibe - the major changes came with Season 7. The Turtles themselves we're given a slight redesign (mostly in their masks) and Avery - noticeably - left as the voice of Shredder. Most prominently though, they stopped using Lorre's theme and changed the opening title montage so that it also included random flashes from the Turtles films as well.

When you look back at it now, the show is kind of goofy to watch and, arguably, only really holds up on the charm of nostalgia and a nice streak of self-aware humour that you may have missed the first time around. There is no escaping the fact though that this series was responsible for making the Turtles the household names they are today, reaching an audience the size of which the comic never could and creating a love for the characters that has lasted 30 years.





I Season / 1997-1998

When you think about it, the idea of a live-action Turtles series made by Saban (who were still at the height of their *Power Rangers* popularity) should have been a licence to print money. The fact that the series was originally touted as a continuation of the 1987 animated series, before becoming a loose continuation of the three films instead, also sounded pretty exciting. So what went wrong? How did it end up becoming so universally despised by the few fans that do remember it, and forgotten by the rest?

The biggest problem with the series is the inclusion of Venus de Milo, the much-maligned *female* Turtle. According to the series, Venus was in the bowl with the Turtles when they came into contact with the ooze, but was separated and taken to China before she mutated. Her return in the series is contrived at best and only seems to be there as a replacement for April (who is absent throughout) and to provide a more acceptable love interest for the other Turtles.

You can see why fans didn't like her. De Milo adds nothing to the overall mythos other than her inclusion eventually leading to Leonardo revealing that the Turtles are spiritual rather than blood brothers. It's a revelation that understandably divided fans, especially as it was likely only included to avoid any hint of incest, what with the other Turtles having a crush on her. Legend has it that Peter Laird hates the character so much that people are not even allowed to mention her in front of him. At all!

On the plus side, visually the series actually looks pretty good... at least until the special effects kick in (making it look like a low-budget version of a mid '90s Sci-Fi Channel film). While the puppet suits

for the villains are quite poor, Splinter and the Turtles themselves look pretty good, albeit a little on the cheap side, and play surprisingly well in the budget constraints of a TV series like this.

That said, it's a small plus in a sea of negatives and despite attempts to boost ratings by crossing the show over with the *Power Rangers*, the series failed to find an audience and was cancelled after its initial 26-episode season run.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

7 Seasons / 2003-2010

There was a brief period in the early 2000s where a bunch of the cartoons you loved in the '80s got the reboot/remake treatment. They were a mixed bag that saw He-Man (actually really good), *Transformers* (*Armada* - actually quite horrible) and the Ninja Turtles return to TV screens.

For the Turtles, their return came after a five-year break from our screens (the longest since they first hit TV screens in 1987) with 4Kids Entertainment/Mirage Studios' animated series which, unlike the 1987 series, used the original Eastman/Laird comics as its inspiration. By sticking more closely to the original comics, the series jettisoned the jokey, cartoonish nature of the 1987 series in favour of a darker and straighter tone.

The early series are very much grounded in the world of the comics (albeit a more child-friendly version) that mostly see the Turtles having to go up against Baxter Stockman, The Purple Dragon Gang and Shredder & The Foot Clan. For the first time on TV, Shredder is played as a real threat to the Turtles, as are the Purple Dragon Gang and the Foot (not just disposable androids this time) and you get a sense that the Turtles are very much heroes out of their depth at times, adding an element of suspense to the series that has been lacking before.

Apart from Raphael - who is now the hothead of the comics rather than the sarcastic wisecracker - the Turtles themselves are essentially the same



characters as before, but with their laidback nature replaced by a more complex approach to their individual characteristics. That's not to say they're not fun and the humour isn't there, it's just that the dial has been turned right back down. Think of the 1987 series through the eye of a Christopher Nolan lens (but still fun).

Other carryovers from the comics are April (now a former lab assistant to Baxter Stockman rather than a reporter) and Casey Jones, the latter playing a much bigger and more important part in the series than he did previously. Instead of the crazed, Dirty Harry-esque vigilante of the 1987 series (who was more of an annoyance to the Turtles than a real ally) this Casey is very much a part of the team, forming a bond with both Raphael and April.

After four seasons, the show's format changed for a season that became known as the 'Ninja Tribunal season', which saw the Turtles trained by a group of Ninjutsu masters in order to develop the skills they will need to face off against the show's second incarnation of The Shredder (this time the Oroku Saki version known as Tengu Shredder).

The series had a major revamp for its sixth season (dubbed 'Fast Forward'), which saw the Turtles and Splinter transported 100 years into the future, where they team up with Cody Jones, a teenage descendant of April and Casey. Again the Turtles' look was redesigned and the show was given a brighter look and tone, with shorter story arcs running through it.

For the seventh and final season (dubbed 'Back to the Sewers'), the Turtles returned to present day New York, where they went up against the series' third incarnation of The Shredder (the Cyber Shredder). The series saw the Turtles redesigned again, making them look more like the characters from 2008's TMNT movie.

TURTLES FOREVER

TV Movie / 2009

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, 4Kids Entertainment and Mirage Studios came up with a story that would see the 2003 Turtles meet up with their 1987 counterparts. It's a concept that could have gone either way, but manages to successfully be both a love letter to Turtles fans and a fun story.

The film sees the 1987 Turtles (along with Shredder and the Technodrome) brought into the 2003 Turtles Universe.



Our contemporary heroes in a half shell must stop Shredder from ridding all universes of the Turtles by destroying the originals in a finale that sees them enter the world of Eastman and Laird's comic book! It's an incredibly cool thing to see the very first incarnation of the Turtles portrayed in animation, and there's a very nice visual nod to every version of the characters since, from TV, movies and the various comics.

Unfortunately, due to union issues, none of the original 1987 voice cast were able to return to their roles, but the story is engaging enough that after a few minutes, you mostly forget that it's not them. Unfortunately, when it was released in the US they got the heavily edited version, whilst we in the UK got the superior uncut edition on DVD (although it is now sadly deleted and selling at high prices online).



nickelodeon. TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES

2 Seasons / 2012 onwards

Having bought the rights to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Nickelodeon wasted no time in putting a new series into development. This time the series is computer animated, which is a little distracting to watch at first, but once you get used to it, actually works really well. In fact there is an argument for the case that these Turtles designs may be the best ones to date (don't get us wrong, we love those 1987 Turtles, but stylistically these Turtles look great – especially as toys).

The series mixes elements from the previous 28 years (at that point) of Turtles history into its own thing. That said, this is clearly a series made by people who loved the '87 cartoon and it shows in many subtle (and not so subtle) ways, such as Splinter's origin as Hamato Yoshi, the return of Krang (now Kraang), who is this time an entire alien race rather than just one being, and the casting of Rob Paulsen (the 1987 Raphael) as Donatello to name but a few.

This series sees the Turtles teaming up with a teenage April O'Neil to help her rescue her kidnapped scientist father from The Kraang, who are planning to use their alien mutagen to transform the Earth into a suitable home for their race (who once more helm from Dimension X). Again the Turtles also have to face off against Shredder and his adopted daughter Karai (along with their Foot Clan) as well.

So far the series has done a great job of appealing to both a new audience and fans of the original, and features great performances from the likes of Jason Biggs (Leonardo), Sean Astin (Raphael), Mae Whitman (April) and Kevin Michael Richardson (Shredder) to name but a few.

Although the show is only just into its second season, it's a compelling watch that promises to soon introduce Casey Jones as well as several more nods to the '87 series, including Baxter the Fly, Bebop and Rocksteady.

No other cartoon has crossed the generations like TMNT have. By reinventing the cartoon for each generation of children in a way that both honours the comics and the series that have gone before, the shows have successfully captured the imaginations and hearts of children (and their parents) in a way that *Masters of the Universe*, *Thundercats* and even *Transformers* have failed to do. Sure, *TurtleMania* will probably never be as huge as it was in the late '80s and early '90s heyday, but there is little doubt that the Turtles – in whatever form they take next – will be on our TV screens for years to come.

SPLINTER SELL

by Jack Bottomley



Put down the nunchucks, order a pizza and stretch your scaly feet, as **STARBURST** concludes its celebration of 30 years of TMNT by flipping the manhole on a world where the merchandise is not just odd, but occasionally Super-Shredder-on-steroids insane!

TMNT is a world of lardom that makes one rethink the "it ain't easy being green" maxim, because judging by the quantity of products out there the resulting cash flow suggests it's very easy, in fact you'll never have to work again! The amount of Turtle stuff available borders on infinite, but to give you an idea of just how much there is we've whittled it down to thirty of our favourites. But how many would you shell out for?

TURTLE BATTLE FUN SET (Playmates, 1988)
This early costume set required a lot of imagination to work (it didn't even have a shell!), but it hasn't stopped the set from being a fashionable item all the same. This was basically a set of knee/elbow pads, a mask with a turtle nose (that made kids look a bit like that meme of an old man with his lips over half his face), a few sashes, a joke book (no, we're not sure why either), a pizza disc and some nunchucks. Nowadays TMNT dressing gowns make better costumes, but back then there was many a kid thinking they could tackle crime with this gear.

COWABUNGA EGG CUP (Mirage Studios, 1990)
Back when Egg Cups were a thing, we got this nicely decorated one resplendent with the faces of our heroes. Though the

irony you'd be breaking a shell using it was perhaps more humorous than the product itself. Oh, and it has the token TMNT phrase "Cowabunga" inscribed on its side, because, well, we all know how easy it is to get excited around a hot egg

LEO'S JOLLY TURTLE TUBBOAT

(Playmates, 1991)

Batman has his Batboat, Bond has his Lotus Esprit Submarine and Leonardo has his... oh. This odd Playmates toy made little sense at all (then again the company did at one point turn a Channel 5 news van into an all-out assault vehicle, so common sense is on holiday here). The fact that the Turtles (very able swimmers by nature) would even need a boat, that this boat would in fact be an altered bathtub, and that this bathtub was pictured (on the box) at sea - a far cry from the sewers - only made it all the more baffling! Still, who needs logic when you have a toy that makes kids feel like one day they can turn their bath into a heroic vessel.

STAR TREK / TMNT ACTION FIGURES

(Playmates, 1994)

No, this is not a figment of our imagination, a Star Trek crossover with Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles really did happen. Why, you ask? Well, that's a question even Spock

would find difficult to answer. You have to give it to Playmates, they were nothing if not inventively outrageous at this point in time. Still, in the grand scheme of things, is it weird seeing the Turtles in Enterprise gear or dressed as clowns, Universal Monsters and heavy metal rockers in other Playmates releases? Illogically collectable

HALFCOURT THE GIRAFFE

(Playmates, 1991)
What's that? You've never heard of him?

You avin' a giraffe? This is Halcourt the mutant giraffe, ace basketball player and another product of the ever-present ooze! In fact, going by Playmates releases during this period, there were more mutations than natural births in Manhattan. This was a desperate time for the toyline, with releases like Scum Bug, Antrax, Ray Fillet, Ghengis Frog, Pizza Face, Doctor El (a witch doctor Elephant!) and Space Usagi (show that search bar some love) all hitting shelves. Still, of them all this basketball playing giraffe was a doozy. Dibs on Arnold the anarchic adder!

MIGHTY MUTANT POWER TURTLES BATTLE THE SECRETIVE GOO 'NHS TAPE AND CO BUBBLEGUM

(1990, Zeebs Enterprises)

If that title doesn't pique your interest, then we're afraid nothing will. OK, so this is one of many rip-offs out there (note the





do they still build it largely held to be included in this list for no other reason that this product is proof that a lot of drugs were taken in the year 1990 by toy company shareholders. How on Earth did the pitch for this large chunk of gum in a VHS tape come about? Did the folks at Zeeks aspire to taste cassette? Did they think TMNT stood for Taste My New Tape? Either way it's nuts and to add to the oddness, there was a bubble gum CD also released, in fact Zeeks made quite a few chewable discs in their day! What's next from these crazed charlatans, I-chewnes perhaps!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES DUELING DUDES (Remco, 1991)

We all know the Rock 'em Sock 'em toys, well here's the Turtles equivalent. Instead of duelling 'bots, you had Shredder and Raphael in the ring, smacking seven shades out of each other for your childhood amusement. We can still hear those over enthused adverts now, "he's really kicking some shell!" They don't advertise like this anymore.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES 3D LIGHT (3D Light FX, 2014)

Probably the newest item on this list and whilst not perhaps the oddest, kids years back would have gawped at this nifty piece of lighting. Essentially, it gives the effect that your favourite Ninja Turtle is crashing through your wall (or rather gently poking his head through it). Indeed, there are lamps and flashlights out there but who wouldn't want a large reptilian creature watching them sleep? Actually let us mull that over and we'll get back to you.



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES CRAB N GLOW (Globe Dragon Technology, 2013)

So what if this torch/light gives off less light than your iPod Nano, and so what if it's smaller than you expect, this crystal-esque bit of kit looks darn fine on the everyday fan's bedside cabinet. It's a rather neat idea really and despite the item's disappointing size and inability to light up the tunnels of a sewer system, it's hard to find a better looking bedside light.

SHELL BACKPACK WITH MASKS AND WEAPONS (Bioworld, 2013)

Of all the things on this list, this is actually one of the best ideas out there. Not only is this easy-clean shell backpack a spacious and fun-looking piece of travel wear, but it also comes with multi-coloured masks and weapons, meaning it doubles up as part fancy dress! This is a shell and a half, and pretty much a must for any uber fan. It's also a slightly easier alternative for anyone wanting to replicate their favourite heroes without actually having to grow their own organic shell on their back. (Which is no easy feat, trust us.)

SUN LOTION APPLICATOR (Planet Toys, 2003)

In the real world a hand is just as good as anything for applying sun lotion, but this isn't the real world, this is the land of merch, where companies have catered for your every need! So feast your eyes on the TMNT Sun Lotion Applicator, a rather complex solution to a problem that doesn't really exist. And are kids really less likely to fidget when Donatello is spitting skin-saving liquid at them?



PIZZA TOSSIN' LEO (Playmates, 1993)

So maybe they are for older TMNT toys out there (certainly under the Playmates banner), but this pizza tossing figure of Leonardo is, for our money, the creepiest little bastard you'll ever pop on a shelf since Chucky! From his crazed eyes to the fact he looks like a badly rendered evil doppelganger of the gang planning to steal your dreams, this is one scary-ass figure. Its pizza lobbing action may be silly but the box art and deranged look of Leo here is certainly no joke. Don, come quick, Leo's got the crazy eyes again!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES LIFE JACKET (Mirage Studios, 1990)

These life jackets for the kiddies were pretty great looking, and plastering a life saving kit with superheroes seems far more logical than the usual talking toothbrush or floating soap dish. These jackets are so good you'd rather drown than not wear one to safety! Ok, maybe not, but when you fall in deep water at least you'll show up your parents with your fashionable life-saving wear Cowabuoyant!

MUTAGEN MAN (Playmates, 1990)

This list has previously made mention of mutated toys, but this one stands alone as the weirdest toy of the lot. Mutagen Man is a rather collectable toy today, but that does not take away from the fact that it looks like a Sea Monkey tank on legs. And you thought Kiang was ugly! This odd creation was another in a long and ever more preposterous line of adversaries for the Turtles because clearly mutagenic ooze.





ninja turtles and a wise old in robes wasn't offbeat enough for the series. That said, Mutagen Man has become somewhat of a cult figure in the franchise, so let's raise a glass to that ol' ooze!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES THEME PLAYED BY BOB BERKMAN WORD ROLL (Q.R.S., 1989)

Lost on many audiences today, this piano roll of the classic Chuck Lorre/Dennis C. Brown TMNT Theme is a sign of just how big the franchise was. When a show theme makes it in this market, you can consider yourself in the money. Many may know this as a Pianola roll, in other words a roll that goes in an automated piano, which plays the tune from the roll itself (in this case imprinted by Bob Berkman). Them Turtles had a shell load of kit lying about didn't they!

DON'S SEWER SOAKER (Playmates, 1991) This water cannon is the very meaning of bombastic, both by name and appearance. This soaker is billed as being able to 'shoot up to 25 feet' and is decorated with just about every bright colour known to man, mutant and reptile. That said, despite being a "sewer soaker" this toy shoots water as opposed to raw sewage, although we suppose a particularly demented child could shoot effluent if they so wished. Not sure if that is the best way to fend off the tyranny of evil, but it might raise a laugh.

TURTLES PIES (Hostess, 1991)

Given the fact they've got the kind of diet that would make Jamie Oliver cry, it's no wonder these Turtles need to be ninjas –

they need the energy! And it's not only the ever bizarrely cartooned pizzas, look at these pies. Filled with Vanilla Puddin' powder, they were part of many kids' daily diet back in the day and those *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze* trading cards didn't hurt either. But crikey Mikey, put down those cards or else you'll end up bingier more than ninjas!

APRIL O'NEIL RAVISHING REPORTER FIGURE (Playmates, 1992)

Or not. Admittedly this figure is not as out-and-out strange as others listed, but look at it, since when has the Turtle's tireless, news reporting ally flaunted her norts around on street corners? "The ravishing reporter" the box reads, as well as a "mess my hair up and die" quote. Sigh. There are no doubts about it, this is a lame attempt to capitalise on the cosmetically glamorous doll market (a la Barbie) and, given she's wearing a skirt shorter than Raphael's temper, appeal to adolescents. Either way, just how right is it enforcing such a toy on the kids market ("suitable for ages 4+") and altering such a great female character to boot? Brings a whole new meaning to the term gutter press. Fail.

SUMO TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES (Playmates, 1993)

See, what did we tell you! Okay, so Playmates' naff idea to fatten up our heroes as sumo warriors (teenage ninjas evidently wasn't a broad enough concept) was little more than a lazy expansion of the toyline. But look at it this way, this could be the most

meaningful piece of trash there. This toy accurately evokes the effects of a pizza-based diet.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES BUBBLE GUM (Topps, 1990)

These fetching store counter bubble gum items from Topps are another example of under appreciating something until it's gone. Contained within little models of our shelled stars, this colourful candy takes you back in time; back to when things were sugar coated and tasty and when music wasn't about who can spit on the most people and be the most debauched child star... that's 2014 folks. Sorry, we went off topic for a minute there. In short, this is some cool chewy candy!

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES TURTLE SQUIRTER (Henry Gordy, 1990)

Normally a tie-in squirts is a tiny little item you fill with water and squeeze and is usually shaped and painted like the head of a character or some such thing, right? In this instance, yes and no, you see, as this is a land of mutated, junk food-eating turtles, nothing is so black and white. Hence this baffling item that has you squirt your friends via a squeezable bulb connected to a pair of silly glasses (raided from Will I Am's closet by the looks of it).

FARMER DON AND MIKE (Playmates, 1993)

One wonders how many kids were excited about seeing the Turtles trade in their nunchucks for a tractor. We'd wager very few. Another example of selling toys by any means necessary, we really don't want to live in a world where planting crops is more





making them look like a green and yellow turtle. That said, these items sets are every, colorable nowadays, and where once you had a hard sell, buyers now seem to have come out of their shell.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES FISHING KIT (Mirage Studios, 1990)

As neat as it is to see the Turtles getting some downtime, this item is a rather unsettling piece of kit when you take the series into account. Think about it, indeed the turtles live around water but what on earth they'd want to fish out of it and put on a plate we can't imagine. Smells fishy to us, or perhaps that's something else.

SOFT POTTY SEAT (Ginsey, 2012)

Now before you start ripping on this item, we'd just like to say that this makes a lot more sense than other items listed. After all, this product aids sending something to the sewer. Still, it is hard to imagine just how enthused a kid could be with a TMNT themed potty, but then again, as one review on Amazon claimed, "it even has a removable pee shield!" Sold!

TMNT 'DAY OF THE DEAD' FLASK

(The Flask Shop, 2014)

This recently released flask combines a love of TMNT and the undead by presenting a distinctively artistic, if a tad crackers, look at our heroes. At least we think the guys are undead here, it's either that or they've aged faster than milk in a sweltering hot summer. Honestly, the stuff you find on Etsy, this is more halfhell heroes than half shell heroes. And is it just us or does Raphael

have a striking resemblance to the dead? Mrs Bates from *Psycho*? Bates Motel, anyone? (Ok, we've officially run into the red zone of hell puns now.)

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES AIR FRESHENERS (Marlenn, 1990)

Well when your headquarters/home/training facility is located in the bustling New York sewer system you're gonna need a blast of minty freshness every now and then! Enter these spiffing little air fresheners that came slap bang in the middle of the TMNT craze. We don't think they smell of pizza though, but mind you they may well help with Foot smells!

POPPIN' PINS BOWLING (Remco, 1990)

There was also a mini golf course and snooker table around at this point too but it's the bowling game people will mostly remember, for all the wrong reasons. This mini-bowling game was fine to look at and having characters grasping the bowling pins was a nice touch. Shame the popping action of the pins was about as jumpy as an arthritic toad and the advertising was even worse. This toy arrived pretty much when the market was as saturated as a loaf underwater but advertising it with guys in big, cheap Turtle costumes (with leering faces) wearing cut-off denim was perhaps not the best way to show how cool something was.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES NASA PATCH (NASA, 2011)

This pretty fantastic NASA TMNT Mission Patch was created for the Multi-Purpose

Logistics Model (MPML) of the International Space Station (ISS) because three of the four modules of the MPML shared their names with the TMNT (read of the acronyms yet?) Of all the merch out there, this has to be one of the most impressively credentialed without doubt. One small step for man, one giant leap for dudekind.

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLE BRA

(Etsy, 2012)

We've heard of the "my eyes are up here" comment, but this is totally confusing matters! In all seriousness (yes we have just said that while talking about a TMNT bra), this item is hardly a surprise, as TMNT undergarments exist for men and women already, although this brassiere really started life in the handmade market over at Etsy. Although since that point a few sites have picked up on the product. We can't imagine why, maybe it was the fashionable colours, the intricate design, or the fact it turns the female bosom into a great big set of eyes!

METALHEAD REPAINTED FIGURE

(Rat Pack Studios, 2013)

This recently rejigged figure by the specialised Rat Pack Studios is an undeniably awesome repaint of the recent 2012 Playmates Metalhead figure (itself a remake of their 1989 Metalhead), which tied in with the 2012-current animated series. It may look more like Torch from the *Puppet Master* series than a Turtle-controlled robot but judging by that firearm (ahem), this could leave Shredder shell shocked! (Sorry, had to get one last one in for good measure!)



OUTSIDE THE BOX

THE LATEST NEWS
FROM THE WORLDS
OF DOCTOR WHO
WITH PAUL MOUNT



DOCTOR WHO World Tour 2014

With filming for the forthcoming eighth season of *Doctor Who* drawing to a close, the BBC have revealed that the show's stars Peter Capaldi and Jenna Coleman will undertake a whistle-stop 'world tour' between 7th and 19th August, visiting seven cities in five continents to publicise the new series. The tour will commence at special events in Cardiff and London on 7th August, after which the stars and current showrunner Steven Moffat (who will not attend every event due to other commitments) will travel to Seoul in South Korea and Sydney in Australia before flying to New York for an event on August 14th. Then it's on to Mexico City and finally Rio de Janeiro in Brazil on August 19th. "It's fantastic that so many people across the world love *Doctor Who*. After eight months solid filming deep in the world of monsters, Jenna and I are thrilled to be heading for the *Planet of Fans*," said Capaldi whilst Moffat chimped in with "I've always thought we'd all be a lot safer if the Doctor conquered the world, instead of the Daleks. Now with Jenna and Peter leading the charge, it looks like it's going to happen. I'll be bringing up the rear to handle the exposition scenes, and maybe carry some bags."

Series 8

The production of the new series - now officially a run of twelve episodes - is coming to an end at the BBC in Cardiff and on location in and around South Wales and further details regarding cast and crew are still emerging. Episode nine, as yet untitled but rumoured to be called *Flatline*, now known to be written by Jamie Mathieson (who has also written the eighth episode) will guest star actor Christopher Fairbank, best known to UK TV audiences for his role as pock marked, light-fingered arsonist, Albert Arthur Moxey, in the classic ITV/BBC drama *Auf Wiedersehen, Pet* (in which he appeared alongside Noel 'Mickey' Clarke when the show was resurrected by the BBC in 2002). Actor Matt Bardock will cross the corridors of the BBC Roath Lock Studio complex, where he plays paramedic Jeff Collier in BBC1's long running hospital drama *Casualty*, to play a character named Al in the same episode which will be directed by Douglas Mackinnon (who has already directed episodes 4 and 5 of the new season). Meanwhile Zawe Ashton, the outrageous Vod in Channel 4's Manchester-based student house-share comedy *Fresh Meat*, has been confirmed as a guest star in the season's second episode, written by Phil Ford, directed by

Ben Wheatley and co-starring Michael Smiley, who has appeared in several of Wheatley's feature film productions. Episode twelve, the season finale written by Steven Moffat, features the return of the Cybermen in the sleek new livery designed for their appearance in Neil Gaiman's *Nightmare in Silver* in season seven. The episode also sees a welcome return for the Doctor's old military chums from UNIT (Unified Intelligence Taskforce) now commanded by Kate Lethbridge-Stewart (played again by Jemma Redgrave). Michelle Gomez (*Green Wing*, *Bad Education*) guest stars in the episode which also features a second appearance from comedy actress Ingrid Oliver as UNIT boffin Osgood, last seen in November's anniversary episode *Day of the Doctor*.

Deep Breath... DOCTOR WHO Returns to TV in August

The BBC have confirmed that the eighth new season of *Doctor Who* will begin on Saturday 23rd August on BBC1 at a time yet to be announced but expected to be on or around 7pm. The first episode is described as "feature-length" (likely to run for sixty minutes) and will be entitled *Deep Breath*. Directed by Ben (Sightlines, *A Field in England*) Wheatley and written by Steven Moffat, the episode sees the newly regenerated Doctor and his undoubtedly bewildered companion Clara arriving back in the Victorian era where they're reunited with the Paternoster Gang triumvirate of Silurian detective Vastra, her tame Sontaran butler Strax and her wife/assistant Jenny.



More WHO Awards

Awards this month not just for **Doctor Who** itself - this time the Rookie Award for 'Best Science-Fiction, Action and Fantasy' at the 35th Banff World Media Festival in Canada early in June - but for two of its more recent luminaries. Captain Jack Harkness actor John Barrowman and former BBC Wales Head of Drama Julie Gardner who, as co-producer for **Doctor Who** when it returned in 2005, helped showrunner Russell T Davies relaunch the series, were both awarded the MBE in the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours List. Barrowman, recently promoted to series regular for his role as Malcolm Merlyn in the upcoming third season of The CW network's hit superhero adventure *Arrow*, was awarded for his services to entertainment and Gardner was recognised for her "services to the economic development of the television industry in Wales."

Meanwhile new Doctor Peter Capaldi has won the first-ever RTS (Royal Television Society) Scotland award. The prestigious award was presented to Capaldi for his "outstanding contribution to television" and the award's citation describes Capaldi as "an acclaimed writer, performer and director... original, memorable, engaging and definitive - his contribution to television has been exceptional, and the committee feel he is a worthy and much deserved winner of this inaugural award."

No success for **Doctor Who** at the 4th Annual Critics' Choice Television Awards, announced on 19th June at the Beverly Hills Hilton in Hollywood. **Doctor Who** itself had not been nominated but Mark Gatiss' 'origins' drama *An Adventure In Space and Time* had been nominated in both 'Best Movie' and 'Best Supporting Actress in a Movie or Mini-Series' category, the latter for Jessica Raine's portrayal of **Doctor Who**'s first producer Verity Lambert. In the event the 'Best Movie' category was won by an HBO production entitled *The Normal Heart* and the 'Best Supporting Actress' nod went to Allison Tolman for her role in FX's *Fargo*, recently screened on Channel 4 in the UK.

Rumour Mill

Appearing recently at an event for the Cambridge Union Society, Eighth Doctor actor Paul McGann hinted that there may well be a sequel to last year's well received 'red button' **Doctor Who** spoof *The Five(ish) Doctors Reboot*, written and directed by Fifth Doctor Peter Davison, which saw Davison and his successors Colin Baker and Sylvester McCoy plotting to invade the BBC Wales Studios during the production of the fiftieth anniversary episode *Day of the Doctor*... Showrunner Steven Moffat's staying put on **Doctor Who**, it appears, at least for the time being; writing in a recent edition of the official **Doctor Who Magazine**, Moffat remarked that he already has the finale to next year's ninth season of **Doctor Who** worked out "and it's a whopper".

Book News Update

Following last month's news item regarding the return of BBC Books' original **Doctor Who** tie-in fiction series to coincide with the commencement of the series itself in August, further details have been announced teasing the storylines of the first three titles:

Doctor Who: The Crawling Terror by Mike Tucker

"Well, I doubt you'll ever see a bigger insect."

Gabby Nichols is putting her son to bed when she hears her daughter cry out.

'Mummy there's a daddy longlegs in my room! Then the screaming starts... Kevin Alperton is on his way to school when he is attacked by a mosquito. A big one. Then things get dangerous.

But it isn't the dead man cocooned inside a huge mass of web that worries the Doctor. It isn't the swarming, mutated insects that make him nervous.

With the village cut off from the outside world, and the insects becoming more and more dangerous, the Doctor knows that unless he can decode the strange symbols engraved on an ancient stone circle, and unravel a mystery dating back to the Second World War, no one is safe.

Doctor Who: Silhouette by Justin Richards

"Vastras and Strax and Jenny? Oh no, we don't need to bother them. Trust me."

Marlowe Hapworth is found dead in his locked study, killed by an unknown assailant. This is a case for the Great Detective, Madame Vastra.

Rick Bellamy, bare-knuckle boxer, has the life drawn out of him by a figure dressed as an undertaker. This angers Strax the Sontaran.

The Carnival of Curiosities, a collection of bizarre and fascinating sideshows and performers. This is where Jenny Flint looks for answers.

How are these things connected? And what does Orestes Milton, rich industrialist, have to do with it all? As the Doctor and Clara join the hunt for the truth they find themselves thrust into a world where nothing and no one are what they seem.

Doctor Who: The Blood Cell by James Goss

"Release the Doctor - or the killing will start."

An asteroid in the furthest reaches of space - the most secure prison for the most dangerous of criminals. The Governor is responsible for the cruellest murderers. So he's not impressed by the arrival of the man they're calling the most dangerous criminal in the quadrant. Or, as he prefers to be known, the Doctor.

But when the new prisoner immediately sets about trying to escape, and keeps trying, the Governor sets out to find out why.

Who is the Doctor and what's he really doing here? And who is the young woman who comes every day to visit him, only to be turned away by the guards?

When the killing finally starts, the Governor begins to get his answers...

All three titles will be released in hardback by BBC Books in September.

DOCTOR WHO Experience Regenerates

Fans of Eleventh Doctor Matt Smith have just a few weeks left to pay their respects to their hero at Cardiff's **Doctor Who Experience** which will close on 1st September to allow a revamp both to the interactive 'walk-through' element of the exhibition and to the costume and prop displays which will be updated to include items from the new season debuting at the end of August. Visitors to the Experience at its permanent home at Roath Lock in Cardiff (next to the BBC Wales Studio complex where the series is actually made) are currently ushered through a 'crack in Time' to help the Eleventh Doctor, trapped in the Pandorica 2 in specially filmed sequences played over monitor screens, to regain control of the TARDIS and navigate their way through encounters with Daleks and Weeping Angels. During the six-week Experience shutdown a new sequence starring Peter Capaldi will be installed in time for the reopening at the end of October.



WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK
AT THE WHONIVERSE
BY JR SOUTHALL



I conducted a small survey on the interwebs this week, enquiring as to what people's earliest memories of Doctor Who consisted of. Unsurprisingly, given that many of the people on my timelines would be of a similar generation to me, most of the results I received were the kind of vivid imagery the classic series appeared to throw up in abundance back in the 1970s. Most popular was the sight of the Sea Devils rising from the water in Episode Five of the Season Nine story, with the giant maggots from 1973's *The Green Death* and the spectacle of the giant spider attached to Sarah Jane Smith's back in the following year's *Planet of the Spiders* not very far behind – although for a young Simon Curtis it wasn't the image as much as it was "The music from *The Sea Devils* as they pull in in their boat and meet Royston Tickner."

The youngest participants in my investigation (in terms of their age at the time the memory imprinted itself, that is!) were Tim Burrows, who "definitely, 100%

had clear memories of the TSS from *Kinda* and chaps in pith helmets – I'd have been less than three years old," and Jim Wilkins: "My earliest TV memory of anything was Sarah Jane in a quarry taking the hand off herself in *The Hand of Fear*. I was three", while a number of others had been seven or thereabouts. "Think it was the Ice Guards coming back to life in *The Keys of Marinus*. Quite spooky for an eight year old!" Andy Ecelson volunteered.

A couple of people remembered back as far as the very first story, with Alan Groves telling me it was "Seeing the skulls with candles inside in *Cave of Skulls*," and Leslie Helen Baker remembered the "First episode ever. Then repeated the next week, due to Kennedy. On my stomach, chin on hands, watching with awe." Conversely, there were a handful of people whose earliest memories were from the Sylvester McCoy era. "The Candyman [sic] screaming as the Doctor escapes up a ladder," Andrew Blair admitted, while Luke Davis' first Doctor Who

memory is neither from the classic series nor of the programme itself at all: "There's a photo of a Dalek from around 2003 I think – the very first image I ever saw of a Dalek."

The Daleks themselves were a very popular earliest memory, with Grant Nock telling me about "Pertwee running through a dark tunnel and being confronted by a Dalek. *Day of the Daleks* on VHS, around 1988," although an also very young Tom Spilsbury remembered "Romana trapped inside the Movellans' explodey-atmosphere thing, while the Doctor tries to deactivate it, in *Destiny of the Daleks*. A very vivid memory from the first story I watched (aged three)" – a memory from a Dalek story but which didn't involve the Daleks themselves. Similarly Simon Hart wrote of "The Movellan burying itself in the sand on Skaro."

The reason I had asked was because I had planned on writing about a particular aspect of memory with respect to how, for contemporary generations, the classic series was a watch once and gone forever



experience, while for modern viewers the new series functions differently. In these days of almost immediate repeat showings, DVD releases and Netflix, those vivid early memories that live on in the mind, in part due to the ephemeral nature of the way in which we captured them, will surely have been replaced by a jumble of images from various stories from all different eras of the new show. Anthony Keetch's recollection of "Cybermen marching across the moon," might just as easily have been created alongside "The Rutan climbing the lighthouse steps," (as remembered by Jenny Shirt) and "The Master captured in a remote-controlled Bessie," (MAW Holmes) in a world in which it had been possible to watch the entire classic series concurrently, rather than spread over 26 years. It seems quite likely that the current generation of children would form composite memories culled from a range of stories restricted neither by Doctor nor by era.

However, even classic series fans were occasionally liable to conflate their



earliest Doctor Who experiences; Thirteen Faces (on Twitter) remembered "The Fourth Doctor defeating Davros on a building top. Years later, I realised that my memory mashed up Davros, Hado and the Collector." Si Hunt, on the other hand, remembers "Nyssa leaning over K9 in the TARDIS! I know now that never happened so I reckon I was remembering Nyssa building her little vibrating device from *The Visitation*." A number of others, particularly those in foreign climes, had memories which are perhaps more suggestive of how modern children will grow up remembering their first encounters with Doctor Who. "I distinctly remember watching Peter Davison exploring Monarch's ship in *Four to Doomsday*," says Tristan Alfaro. "I'm guessing that would have been on the first broadcast in Australia. But over here Who was endlessly repeated so I also distinctly remember watching Jon Pertwee getting attacked by a telephone cord in *Terror of the Autons*, sometime in the early 1980s." "One of mine," adds Jon Preddle of New Zealand, "is the last few minutes of *The Tenth Planet* Episode 4! I also recall bits from *Planet of Giants*..."

The Doctor himself often wasn't a distinct presence in people's early recollections of the series, even those that weren't centred on the monsters. Suky Khakh's "Earliest memory of Doctor Who is from *The Face of Evil*. I could remember Leela and her tribe but not the Doctor," and Angela Roberts too was more impressed by the companions: "I have vague memories of Leela... but no particular story! My first vivid memory is of Romana dressed in white in *The Ribos Operation*." Jayne (aka littlebrowndawg on Twitter), on the other hand, remembered "Jon Pertwee's fluffy white hair."

Among the Cybermats, giant Robots and Peter Cushing movies, there were a few people who confessed to remembering less than stellar moments: Mark Whiteley's "first clear memory of the actual series is of Mel in the ball trap in *Time and the Rani*. Classic. Yep, I went there"; Erika Ensign remembers "the Myrka in *Warriors of the Deep*. As a kid, I thought it was scary as hell. So there"; and David Busch recalls "the spinning surface of the planet Voga, as Nerva Beacon falls towards it. Funnily enough, I was ten years old, knew it looked fake, but didn't mind at all. (Still don't!)" On the other hand, it wasn't always what we think of as the memorable moments that people registered, such as "Scariloni pulling his face off" (Matt Barber) to reveal his true self in *City of Death*, for as Jon Arnold recalls, "Tom and Lalla running around Paris. Not the Jagaroth, not the spaceship, not the witty lines, not Julian Glover but two people just running round Paris like nutters."

And it wasn't always the television series that caused people to start taking notice, either, sometimes it was what was happening elsewhere that burned the events of the series into the memory. For Tariq Latif, "an image I associate with my first love of the series was seeing the Madame Tussauds Meglos Doctor on the day the exhibition opened (in 1980) which was also my birthday," and Paul Holmes remembers "The Mind Robber Episode



1 being transmitted during a massive thunderstorm that kept interfering with the picture, making it a lot spookier than it was ever meant to be.

"Trying to conjure up a specific memory just reminds me of the time we missed *Battlefield* because something big was happening on *Corrie*..." Paul adds. "I remember crying because the VHS hadn't started recording while Rita and Audrey were in the Cabin."

"Mine is winning *The Abominable Snowmen* Target novel in a raffle," Anthony Carroll offered, although "More memorable for me was the discovery of other Doctors when a scout along the family bookshelf revealed copies of *Doctor Who* and the *Zarbi and Carnival of Monsters*," added Ian McArdell. Paul Butler recalled "driving through London in a taxi and seeing a real police box on a street corner."

I don't suppose I learned an awful lot from a not very representative sample of all of just over a hundred people, but I did enjoy rooting through the memories of some almost-strangers for a change, rather than espousing the usual questionable theories of my own. I hope you haven't minded sharing them too.

ART: SIMON BRETT



COMPANDIUM

PAUL MOUNT WITH
THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE
TO THE DOCTOR'S
FELLOW TRAVELLERS



AMY POND

When we last turned our spotlight on Amy Pond, the Eleventh (Twelfth?) Doctor's first travelling companion and, indeed, the very first sentient creature the Time Lord set eyes on after his regeneration, *Doctor Who* had just started its sixth new season and Amy - now with slightly sappier husband Rory tagging along - was still a fixture aboard the TARDIS. But a lot of water has flowed under a lot of bridges since then - and a lot of head-scratching plot twists - and Amy has taken her final bow in 'The Angels Take Manhattan', halfway through the seventh season. **Companidium** renews its acquaintance with Leadworth's only kissogram/supermodel/journalist to find out just what fate (and Steven Moffat) had in store as she continued her journey in Space and Time...

Faced with the difficult challenge of creating a new companion after the warm, homely triumvirate of Rose, Martha and especially Donna, from his predecessor Russell T Davies' era, new showrunner Steven Moffat elected to fashion a character who would be as much a mystery as the Doctor himself. When the TARDIS crash-lands in a domestic garden late at night, the only witness is seven year-old Amelia Pond who, for reasons which are never explained, appears to be living alone (or, at best, has been left alone) in a poky cottage. Amelia, troubled by a mysterious glowing crack in her bedroom wall, asks the Doctor

to take him with her in the TARDIS, which the Doctor, rather oddly considering he's never travelled with a seven year-old before, seems to be considering as a viable option. He promises to return in five minutes but the TARDIS actually reappears twelve years later. In the intervening years young Amelia has suffered psychological trauma due to the inexplicable visitation of this 'raggedy man'. She's also grown up, grown long legs and got herself a career; she's now a kissogram apparently earning a living in the one-street village of Leadworth miles from Gloucester. Now that's enterprising. In her first episode, 'The Eleventh Hour', Amy comes across as whiny and needy, a much colder fish than her immediate predecessors. She's so fascinated by the return of her 'imaginary friend' that she casually dismisses the hapless Rory (her boyfriend at this point) as just a 'friend'. After a breathless battle against the ruthless alien police force known as the Atraxi, the Doctor disappears again, only to return two years later with a regenerated TARDIS and an invitation which Amy can't resist. She's quickly aboard the TARDIS and the episode hardly helps to endear her to the audience by revealing her wedding dress hanging on the back of her bedroom door; she's effectively dumped her fiancé Rory the night before their wedding.

Season five attempts to craft an intriguing mystery around Amy as she and the new Doctor embark on their travels. The enigmatic 'crack in the wall' crops

up everywhere, Amy seems to have no knowledge of Earth-shattering events she really should be aware of and, in one extraordinarily misjudged sequence at the end of 'Flesh and Stone', Amy clumsily attempts to seduce the Doctor who, quite rightly appalled, recruits the luckless Rory to join the pair on the TARDIS, if only to help control Amy's raging hormones. Fantasy story 'Amy's Choice' goes some way towards resolving the girl's conflicted feelings about Rory and the Doctor as Rory is killed (not for the last time) and Amy is forced to confront her true feelings for her childhood sweetheart. Before long, Rory is killed again, for real, his entire existence is swallowed by one of the mysterious 'cracks' and Amy's memory of him is erased. Fortunately Rory returns in the season finale as an Auton facsimile (disguised as a Roman centurion) crafted to trap the Doctor (stay with me here) which triggers Amy's subconscious memories of her fiancé. Auton/Centurion Rory proceeds to stand guard outside the Pandorica prison Amy is kept alive in for 2000 years after he's compelled to shoot her with his inbuilt Auton weaponry. In the season finale 'The Big Bang' the Doctor realises that the connection between Amy and the 'cracks' stems from a massive temporal explosion on her wedding day - the destruction of the TARDIS - which created the cracks in the first place. The Doctor reboots the Universe (as you do) and travels back to Amy and Rory's big day where he plants memories of himself and the TARDIS into her mind, thus restoring himself to reality in a timeline where Amy's never-before-mentioned parents are suddenly alive and well.

Fans hoping for a more straightforward narrative for the newlyweds in season six were to be disappointed, as Amy found herself in the middle of another typically Steven Moffat time-twisting storyline (which we adamantly refuse to describe as *timy-winey*). Amy and Rory, now happily married and living... well, somewhere... are reunited with the Doctor, now apparently two hundred years older but with the same face, when he sends them a mysterious summons instructing them to travel to Utah. Amy reveals that she is pregnant and plagued by peculiar visions of a mysterious eye-patched woman and at the end of 'The Almost People' we discover that this Amy is actually an artificial entity created by her own consciousness; the real Amy is actually being kept prisoner by the eye-patched woman, Madame Kovarian, and is close to giving birth. It transpires that Amy's baby Melody is kidnapped at birth by Kovarian,

who, at the behest of creepy new baddies The Silence, intends to train the baby to become an assassin who will kill the Doctor. The baby actually grows up to be the Doctor's old sparring partner River Song (Alex Kingston) and, having been conceived aboard the TARDIS - are you keeping up with all this? - is actually possessed of Time Lord regenerative abilities. Mels, an old school friend of young Amy and Rory, is actually their own daughter, a 'young' version of River who spectacularly regenerates into Doctor Song in 'Let's Kill Hitler'. There may be questions at the end of the column...

But perhaps Amy's finest (or most irritating) hour was the more low-key and stand-alone 'The Girl Who Waited', a rather touching episode set in a futuristic quarantine facility where Amy finds herself trapped for over thirty years. The Doctor and Rory travel back to rescue the young Amy but the 'older' Amy insists on being rescued too. The Doctor understands the danger inherent in a paradox and has no choice but to leave the 'older' Amy behind. Meanwhile the whole Amy/River storyline reaches a conclusion of sorts in 'The Wedding of River Song', in which Amy is fighting the manipulative Silence in an alternative reality before history is, yet again, restored.

Season seven, split into two batches of episodes, saw Amy and Rory back home and enjoying occasional visits from the Doctor. In 'Asylum of the Daleks', Amy, now a famous model (of course) is in the middle of a divorce from Rory, who can't cope with the fact that his wife can't have natural children due to her experiences with Melody/River/Kovarian/Uncle Tom Cobley. The Doctor forces them to re-evaluate their relationship and, phew, by the end of the episode they're back in each other's arms again. The next few episodes develop a vague thread in which Amy and Rory intermittently travel with the Doctor and tolerate the disruption he causes in their lives. In 'The Power of Three', however, Amy, now a journalist (a natural career progression for a former kissogram-cum-model) chooses her



normal life with Rory rather than continually travelling into perilous, frivolous situations with the Doctor, until Rory's previously unmentioned father Brian (Mark Williams) encourages them to continue exploring the Universe with the Doctor. But their travels don't last long: in the following episode 'The Angels Take Manhattan', the pair are blasted back to 1930s New York by a stray Weeping Angel and, due to a creaky plot point which forbids the Doctor returning the TARDIS to New York without causing a temporal catastrophe, are forced to spend the rest of their lives in a foreign land, away from their family and friends who can never know what became of them. Amy returned to the Doctor as a 'vision' at the moment of his regeneration in 'Time of the Doctor', aptly muttering 'Raggedy-man... goodbye.'

The problems inherent in involving a companion character in such dense storylines are pretty self-evident. Whilst it could be argued that many of the 'mysteries' surrounding Amy and her background and her pregnancy don't stand up to much serious scrutiny, the programme's focus was so firmly fixed not only on establishing

these 'mysteries' but making them as arcane and complicated as possible, presumably to allow the showrunner to demonstrate his skill as a witty and clever storyteller. But by focussing so much on plot (however opaque), there's precious little room for proper character development, and Amy's dramatic situations were so extreme and so removed from the cosy family dynamics of Rose and co. that it became difficult for audiences to get a proper feel for Amy as a believable person. Uneven writing didn't help; the self-obsessed Amy of 'The Eleventh Hour' became the Amy who was desperately in love with her put-upon (and previously potentially-jilted) fiancé, who became the Amy whose daughter was kidnapped at birth by a vicious psychopath but who rarely showed a great deal of concern for her child's well-being or whereabouts and was quite happy to wander around the Universe with the Doctor and her floundering husband.

Perhaps what we've learned from Amy is that it's probably not necessarily a good idea to focus whole story arcs around the companion character who, in reality, is aboard the TARDIS to serve as an identification figure for the audience and to help it navigate the intricacies of the story. The 21st century incarnation of Doctor Who initially made great play of teaming the Doctor up with realistic, believable, modern female companions but, unlike the 'classic' series, genuine efforts were made to give the characters lives, families and an identifiable and relatable background to sweeten the pill of the Doctor's extraordinary and outlandish exploits.

Amy - cold, distant, detached from any noticeable family ties and with a personality which changed with the weather - was a bold attempt to break a recent mould but perhaps, with hindsight, Steven Moffat might have better served his audience if he'd recalled the old adage 'if it ain't broke, don't fix it.' Fans could only hope that Amy's replacement would be a more traditional and recognisable companion character unencumbered by needlessly-fussy mysteries and meandering story arcs.

But then came Clara Oswald...



REVIEWS

NEW WHO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



DOCTOR WHO – ENGINES OF WAR

HARDBACK / AUTHOR: GEORGE MANN /
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE:
JULY 31ST

If anyone was expecting to find out how the War Doctor grew from the fresh-faced John Hurt we caught a glimpse of at the end of *Night of the Doctor* into the grizzled warrior we saw in *The Name of the Doctor* and *The Day of the Doctor*, they will be sadly disappointed. This novel, the latest from the author of several Sherlock Holmes novels and the Newbury and Hobbes series, shows the short lead-up to the specific choice (the moment, if you will) that made the Doctor decide to end the Time War. And it's as predictable as that sounds.

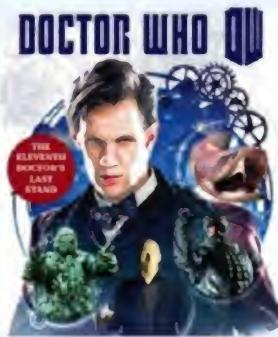
For a product of a series that has shown us time and time again that time can be rewritten (even while it says it can't), the plot of this book has a depressing inevitability about it. From the minute we first meet the Doctor's new companion, we know almost exactly how the whole thing's going to turn out, what will cause him to serve notice on both combatants. We can't help but feel that what Mann really wanted to focus on was the minutiae of the Time War and if that's what you're looking for, you've come to the right place.

We get answers to mysteries such as what the Skaro Degradations were (the answer is both plausible and vile) and how exactly you fight a Time War. The probability engine (though not an object previously mentioned on the show) in particular really conveys how insane Rassilon is, so kudos to Mann for that. His characters feel very true to the established portrayals; most of the Doctor's lines read like they could have come from John Hurt himself and though Cinder has never appeared on the show we get a strong sense of the kind of person she is.

The story's predictability let it down somewhat, but if you're the kind of person who lets the well-paced story lead them without thinking ahead, then this book is probably for you. We'll almost certainly be reading it again in any case, which is more than we can say for some Who novels of the last few years.

SCOTT VARNHAM

+++++ 7



DOCTOR WHO – TALES OF TRENZALORE

PAPERBACK / AUTHOR: JUSTIN RICHARDS,
GEORGE MANN, PAUL FINCH, MARK MORRIS /
PUBLISHER: BBC BOOKS / RELEASE DATE:
OUT NOW

Steven Moffat's Doctor Who constantly divides opinions, but one area where it's certainly not lacking in scale. The Time of the Doctor, Matt Smith's swansong, saw the Time Lord defending the town of Christmas

in a nine-hundred-year siege. Of course, the episode itself only lasted an hour, and so much of this conflict occurred off-screen. It's these narrative gaps that Tales of Trenzalore, an anthology of four stories, aims to fill. Released as an eBook earlier this year, Tales is now available in paperback.

First off is Justin Richards' Let it Snow, in which the Ice Warriors plot to kill the Doctor by messing with the town's weather. It's the weakest of the lot, the main problem being that it takes its time building up to a blindingly obvious twist that anyone can see coming from five pages in. Once the reveal finally happens, the story continues to surprise no one, with a generic Doctor-vs-evil-plot climax remarkable only for a use of the sonic screwdriver actually related to sonic energy.

Next up is George Mann's An Apple a Day, in which the carnivorous Krynnoid turns Trenzalore's plant life against the town. The herbaceous horror hits all the right notes, particularly a nasty body horror sequence in which a man turns into a plant. The story's weakness is the child companion placed alongside the Doctor; seeing the ageing hero through young, admiring eyes is a great idea, but young Theo's loss of his father is only brought up towards the end – an opportunity for character development missed out on.

Strangers in the Outland by Paul

Finch sees Autons terrorising the people of Trenzalore. Though little is made of the weirdly irrelevant detail that they're disguised as the Doctor, they're not to be messed with, depicted here as brutal plastic thugs, and the story leads to a very action-centred crescendo.

In Mark Morris' The Dreaming, by far the highlight of the volume, the mysterious Mara infects the minds of Christmas' citizens, leading them to bring it into physical form via an occult ritual that would look genuinely scary on screen. Morris captures the voice of the Eleventh Doctor significantly better than the other writers; here he's at his most elderly, still playful yet capable of intimidating rage, and there's much-needed complexity added to his relationship with the villagers.

Overall, what we have here is a mixed bag. While the first three stories aren't without charm, they all feel Who-by-numbers, and more bolder stories like The Dreaming would be appreciated. If you were a fan of The Time of the Doctor, this light reading will flesh out its world for you, but, like giving a Krynnoid a sausage roll, it's inessential, forgettable flesh.

KIERON MOORE

+++++ 5

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GORE DAY, MATE!

by Andrew Pollard



Australian horror movie *WOLF CREEK* came out of nowhere to create quite the buzz in 2005. Focussing on JOHN JARRATT as the twisted Mick Taylor and his penchant for offing tourists, the film went on to be a hit across the globe. With *WOLF CREEK 2* now primed for a UK release, we caught up with director GREG MCLEAN and star JOHN JARRATT himself to discuss the two films so far, the creation of a horror icon, *Australiana*, and a whole lot more...

STARBURST: With the first *Wolf Creek* film coming out in 2005, why was there such a wait for this sequel and was it always the plan to do a follow-up?

McLean: I'd always planned to do a sequel. Part of my thinking was to make a number of films, with the character being an ongoing horror character. That was partly in my mind. We thought about making the sequel and had a script almost a year after the first film came out, and then it took a long time to get it right. We developed for years and years, then I went on to other things. We just kind of got busy. So it was always part of the plan, but it took a lot longer than we thought to get it going.

What was the catalyst for it to eventually happen then?

McLean: There was one script that we had had for quite a while that was really good but wasn't amazing. In the back of my mind was unless it was really good then it's probably not worth doing. I think I was kind of subconsciously holding it back until I knew that the script had all of the elements that I thought would be needed to make a sequel that was a worthy successor to a film that I was very happy with. So it did take a while for those things to fall into place.

The sequel starts with a lot of action, but the second half of the movie sees more of Mick's personality come through in terms of dialogue and interaction. Was that a welcome addition to the character?

Jarratt: In the first one, I was only in 50% of the movie; the monster was slowly let out of the cage. Now he's out of the cage, so you get him from the get-go. I had a lot more to do. We worked really hard on our script. Greg got up to about a third or fourth draft, then I worked with him for about three or four years on it. We explored and found things. We wanted it to be as good, if not better, than the first one. So we had plenty of time to figure out something interesting to do.

McLean: The first film can only happen once. You can only tell that story once, because once you've seen that movie then the cat's out of the bag. The cat in this case is the character of Mick and what he is. Going into this, we know what his character is. You have to reacquaint him with the audience from the first movie. It's an entirely different game in how this

film has to be structured in order to make sense of its relationship to the first movie. They're two different things in lots of ways.

John, how easy was it to fall back into the Mick Taylor character after having such a break between the two movies?

Jarratt: The first one meant whether it worked or not, so that was a bit scary, because I had this funny voice and this silly laugh. We didn't really know until the film was made whether it worked or not. So I know it works - I gleefully fell back into it. I had a good time with it.

McLean: The first film was trying to find the voice of the character. The first one was more difficult than the second one because we're dealing with the idea that some people who see this film would have seen the first movie. And the first movie didn't really give much away about the nature of the character at all; his motivation or what he was about. He kind of arrived and it was then revealed that he was the character he was. So it's just really a balancing act, writing this one, about how much to reveal, how to keep him entertaining and interesting without giving up too much about his personality.

As a filmmaker, Greg, what lessons, both positive and negative, did you take from the first *Wolf Creek* and look to implement here?

McLean: There were a few things that I definitely wanted to maintain from the first film and not lose in the sequel. I certainly wanted this to be a different genre of film. The first one is an outback horror film, this is definitely more of an action/suspense film. And it was always designed to be that. This film was about exploring different ways of achieving the fear and the suspense of the first one. I wanted to maintain the essence of the atmosphere of the first film. The first film had a very intense atmosphere, just with the place and landscape, the texture of the world



that he inhabits. I wanted to maintain those scenes, but I always wanted to maintain the counterpoint between the extreme beauty of the landscape that he exists in and the extreme terror that takes place in that place. So I was very much interested in looking at it from that point; the design, the cinematography, the music choices, things like that.

Mick Taylor's got to the point now where he's mentioned by some in the same bracket as a Michael Myers, a Freddy Krueger, a Jason Voorhees. How do you find that?

Jarratt: Well it's great to be an actor on the planet and somewhere in your career you've created an iconic character. I'm very proud of that aspect of it, and I hope it does keep working for me.

McLean: He was based on two true killers in Australia. The true story element of it is where he began, in one sense - in the sense that he's a combination of Bradley Murdoch and Ivan Milat. So it's combined elements of those true characters, and then took a lot of Australian archetypal characters and cultural mythology, like Crocodile Dundee and Steve Irwin, and wove those characters into a combination to come up with the character. It's really a combination of what the international perception of the Australian personality is, then also having this hidden side of that personality that's the dark and negative stuff as well. It's a kind of an interesting combination of those two things; the iconography and the repressed side of the country.

Like many a horror icon, he's a villain that many will find themselves almost cheering on through a film. People will be going to this sequel to see Mick Taylor...

Jarratt: Yeah, I suppose so. I like to think the character's more along the same lines as *Cape Fear* and *Psycho* and those kind of films, as opposed to Freddy Krueger. This guy exists in the world, this can happen. That's the interesting part of it, for me, that this is not bullshit; it really does happen.

Mick is very much his own man. What did you use as influences for his mannerisms?

Jarratt: I had to look into the psychology of being a serial killer and what makes someone a psychopath, so I read a bit about Ivan Milat, the famous serial killer in Australia, and [Bradley] Murdoch, the guy who's probably closer to Mick in the sense that he's an outback lunatic. It was just trying to find the justification of why human beings do that. He's based on an impersonation of my old man, who's a big, gregarious, funny, happy-go-lucky outback boy, but he's not a psychopath or a serial killer, so I've added those two aspects to it. I kinda looked at human history and how people are justifying things. It's not that long ago that people in America were gleefully hanging African-Americans up to trees in the Ku Klux Klan. You don't have to look very far to see manic human traits; it's a big part of who we are, and you have to face up to that. It goes back forever, like you Pompey bastards and the Crusades...

I'm Welsh...

Jarratt: You're Welsh? You're Celtic, you're alright.

Given the character's twisted sense of national pride, how differently do people respond to Mick Taylor in Australia compared to the international markets?

Jarratt: They kind of love him in a macabre-kind-a-hating way. The men love the character, which is a bit of a worry when you think about it. And the women



"So long as the general public keep their pirating fingers off *WOLF CREEK 2* and buy something, there'll be a *WOLF CREEK 3*!"

– John Jarratt

are scared shitless about the guy and are not really fond of him at all... which probably says a lot about men and women.

It was touched upon earlier how you use traits and characteristics that international audiences will be familiar with. With the sequel, were you trying to tailor the film to an international audience more?

McLean: Not really, no. It's kind of the opposite really. It was made really just for people who were fans of the first movie. In some ways I made it even more Australian, which a lot of people were saying, "Are you afraid of alienating American audiences because it's so Aussie and the language is so particular and using lots of Aussie slang?" I think it's hard to tailor a film to an American audience if you're not from America, because if you're making a film in your own country then it just looks like a shitty American film. So it's better to just embrace entirely your own culture if you're making a film outside of America. Rather than doing it half-assed; it doesn't make sense to do that. One of the comments that I like that people say about this film is that it's so drenched in Australian; it's a celebration. Even though he's a terrible character, an old fashioned Australian in ways of phrases and words, it's kind of an Australian piece as well as an action/horror film.

In terms of reaction to the *Wolf Creek* films themselves, what's the main differences that you notice in an international audience compared to an Australian audience?

McLean: The film did very well in Australia; everyone was talking about it and it was widely released. I think in Australia the reaction was sometimes more mixed because you have a sequel to a popular horror film. It gets reviewed by people who don't like or ever see horror films, so when those mainstream critics see the film and they're asked to comment on *Wolf Creek* 2, they're outraged. These people have never seen a horror movie and would never



seek one out. It's like asking a classical music critic to comment on the latest Dr. Dre album – they'll hate it because it's not their thing. So people are surprised when all of these critics are saying all this crap about the film, but you can't be surprised really because it's not the kind of stuff they enjoy. Whereas in America, because there's such a massive horror fanbase, those are the people who are seeing it and loving it. Everything that some of the Australian critics were offended by, they are embracing it. The energy of the film, they're loving it. It's very warmly received. It did well in Australia, no question, but there were certainly a lot of people who weren't used to that type of horror.

The term *Australiana* is something that is often associated with *Wake in Fright* (1971). It seems to be about fully embracing the characteristics, language, personality and scenery of what Australia has to offer...

McLean: Yeah, it is. I certainly have fondness for that stuff. I grew up in the countryside, my family is all from the countryside, so a lot of it is stuff that I'm particularly fond of and interested in. It's national identity stuff, but interestingly the film, a large part of the movie, thematically, becomes about the character becoming part of an Australian character that is really about colonialism; the history of Australia, where some of the bizarre xenophobia comes from

in Australia, right back to the origin of the country which comes from English convicts being dumped in Australia and left to survive. There's a sort of subconscious cultural scar that exists that the film really explores.

In terms of the perception of yourself as an actor and a person, John, any worries about how the character of Mick will paint you in people's eyes?

Jarratt: Well, small-minded producers are the only ones that piss me off because they think, "Bring John Jarratt in? No, no, they'll think it's Mick Taylor." That's a bit of a drawback for me. It's something of a double-edged sword, where I've done the character so well that people don't want to employ me as anything else. So that's a bit of a worry. But I've overcome that by making my own movies and putting myself in them and directing them.

McLean: John's really good. The two movies that I've made, he's been in both of them. He was the star in the first *Wolf Creek* and he played a lot of the characters in *Rogue*. We get along very well. He's a very instinctive actor. He makes some pretty amazing choices as an actor, and he's very brave. Mick is a very particular character, so to fully embrace him, to do it properly and not make it a joke, even though the character has a very black humorous edge, he walks that fine line very, very well. We just like working together, and we collaborate





very well on set. We kind of create the character together, and he's very fun to work with.

Have any suggestions come up in the two films that you thought were too much or a no-no for you?

Jarratt: Well we have a lot of fun making it, because it's not real and we get a bit of a giggle out of things. Greg and I have what we call Beavis and Butthead moments. Greg said, when I was walking through those tunnels, sing *The Hills are Alive with the Sound of Screaming* or something, and I'd go "huh-huh-huh-huh", which means it was Beavis and Butthead, it's too much, it's not gonna work. So we have our Beavis and Butthead barometer.

Are there any plans for any further *Wolf Creek* movies and do you see any legs in Mick Taylor and the world that you have created?

McLean: It depends on the audiences really. There are only sequels to successful movies, so if the film does really well then there's definitely an opportunity to make a third film. We'll just see how it plays internationally.

Jarratt: So long as the general public keep their pirating fingers off the film and buy something, it'll be okay!

McLean: If we were to do another, there won't be such a long wait, that's for sure.

So you have ideas ready for a third movie if called upon?

McLean: Absolutely! Just naturally, you think of things, think of ideas and storylines. In the interim, as well as thinking of a sequel, we've developed two *Wolf Creek* prequel novels, talking about Mick's early life before the first movie and how he became this insane serial killer.

Do you not feel with prequels, half of the mystique with a character such as Mick Taylor is not knowing?

McLean: Well the novels go way back; it's another timeline. The first book, *Origin*, goes from when he is a young boy until he's an 18-year-old. Because it's taking place in the late '40s and '50s in the Australian outback, it's an entirely different type of character, a different world. It's interesting. I think there's certainly that danger of basically just... it is about mystique on some level... but there's also a level of fascination on how this character evolves.

What's next for you both?

Jarratt: I've just directed and acted in a

film called *StalkHer*. It's kind of a cross between *Misery* and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and it's set in a room at night with two people. The tag-line is, "He chased her... until... she caught him." That'll be out in Australia probably in October. We'll start in Australia then have the Dutch auction hopefully, sell it and get a good price.

McLean: 6 *Miranda Drive*. It's got Kevin Bacon in, Radha Mitchell, and an amazing cast. It's a project that I wrote a couple of years ago with my production partner. Once *Wolf Creek* was released, we just found a great home at Blumhouse, which is Jason Blum and his team. So it came together pretty quickly. It was my first film shooting out of Australia, actually. It was fun shooting a movie in Los Angeles.

And was that a nice challenge?

McLean: It's different. The crew of the film are having a great time shooting. Also shooting in a house is a huge thrill for me, as I've made three films and each one has been in the outback and on highways. So actually shooting in a house, I've never

done that before, it's a very mundane thing but it's just very exciting to see how much terror and suspense that you can create in the atmosphere of a house.

Once that film's done, what else is lined up for yourself?

McLean: Previously I took a long break from directing, between *Wolf Creek* and *Rogue*, did a whole bunch of other stuff: a comic book company, a publishing company, some producing, producing for some friends. After *Wolf Creek* 2, I had such a good time making that movie, I'm kicking myself that I wasn't back in the chair earlier. Now I'm just really thrilled about making movies again, getting in the director's chair. At the moment, all I'm focussed about is making sure that the film I'm doing currently is as good as it can be. Then we'll see what happens. +

WOLF CREEK 2 hits the UK September 15th, and will be available on DVD/Blu-ray.

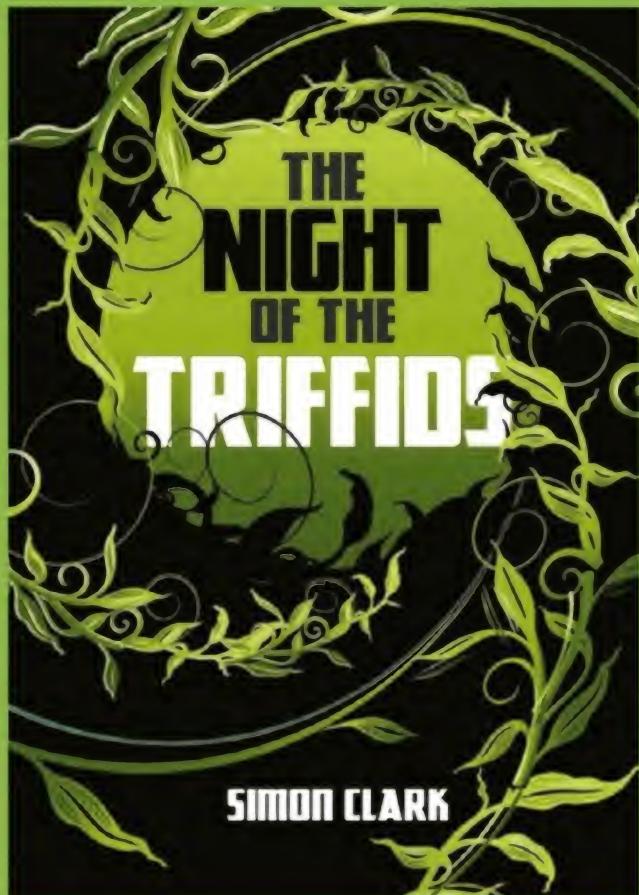
ORIGIN: WOLF CREEK - BOOK ONE and DESOLATION GAME: WOLF CREEK - BOOK TWO are on sale now.



ARMAGARDEN

Words: Tony Jones

We sat down with writer SIMON CLARK to discuss the forthcoming audio adaptation of his acclaimed science fiction sequel *THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS*, the novel's imminent re-release, Hawkwind, and just how good lunch in the BIG FINISH studio really is...



STARBURST: *The Night of the Triffids* was released in 2001 and met with a great reception, including winning the British Fantasy Award for Best Novel the following year. Now, thirteen years later, it's being re-released in August by Constable & Robinson. Why is now the time to re-release? Is it triggered by the planned big screen remake of *The Day of the Triffids*?

Simon: I wanted to get the book out there again. It spent a few years in limbo. Ebooks had started to take off and I looked round for a publisher with a great track record for innovation and able to do a damn good job at promotion for both their ebooks and paperbacks - and Constable and Robinson fitted the bill. Certainly, a new film of *The Day of the Triffids* will help get the book noticed. I'm looking forward to seeing what *The Triffids* can do in 3D!

When you wrote *The Night of the Triffids* how constrained did you feel by the immense legacy that John Wyndham left behind him? What was your main concern - writing a good book or writing so as to meet the expectations of Wyndham fans? Yeah, it's one of those things when you have a great idea, and suddenly you have to make the idea work, or end up looking like a total idiot. I love John Wyndham's book and when I was given the go-ahead to continue his story, that's when the terror of failing to do his work justice hit me like a bolt of lightning. After wondering how I should approach it, I thought back to when I first read the book when I was twelve or thirteen, and how I wished there was a sequel because that story of Triffids and survival against the odds was so damn good. Eventually, I decided I should focus on writing the kind of novel I wanted to read - it sort of sounds selfish, but I told myself that I shouldn't try and be all pretentious and hifalutin in my approach. I decided to write from the gut. Write something exciting. You know? Something that

grabs the attention and moves fast. Lots of surprises and action...

Speaking of Wyndham fans, why *Triffids*? Is this simply because it's your favourite or because it's the story that most readily asks what next?

When I read Wyndham's *Triffids* it was one of those 'WOW' moments. It's the kind of story that dives deep inside your head and messes with your mind – in a good way. It seems to hit those fears that we have on instinct levels where we fear that the collapse of civilisation could really happen, we have news reports every week that prophesise just that. So, as a twelve year old, I wondered what it would be like if the population went blind overnight. And how could I survive if suddenly venomous plants came shuffling into the garden.

Have you ever been tempted to write other Wyndham-connected stories, or are you happy with what you've done? Would you run the risk of losing your own voice if you only wrote Wyndham sequels?

I'm happy with *The Night of the Triffids*. In some ways the book has a life of its own now. It's been translated into lots of different languages around the world. You're right, though: if you use someone else's style for too long then you might become trapped. So, for now, I'm sticking with my own way of doing things, which usually means lots of horror and general mayhem.

For this re-issue, have you made any substantial changes to the book?

No, it's just as it was apart from a new cover, of course.

We understand that when you write a first draft you tend to listen to Hawkwind, and in particular *Hall of the Mountain Grill*. Are you a big Hawkwind fan and does their music influence you much? We notice from your website that you have written prose for U2, so music is obviously important to you. Hawkwind are well known for their space rock and have played at science fiction conventions – would you like to hear their take on *The Night of the Triffids*? It would be great to hear if any of the Hawkwind musicians have read the book. After all, a lot of their songs have science fiction ideas. Writing listening to their music, and music by other bands, drives my stories along and gives them more power, and dare I say UMPH! Yes, I like Hawkwind a lot. *Hall of the Mountain Grill* is a surreal soundscape of eerie places, mixed with explosive, high-energy rock – there's light and shade, vicious and gentle, loud and quiet, and that's the kind of feel I aim to put into my work.

Not only is the book coming out again this year but you've also adapted it for audio. How did that come about and when did Big Finish get involved in the process?
I've known the Big Finish producer, John Ainsworth, for over ten years. We worked together on *Blood of the Robots*, which would have been an animated *Doctor Who* story for the BBC's website – *would have been*... the BBC decided not to continue with it when the live-action *Doctor Who* returned. Anyway, last year I mentioned to John that I thought *The Night of the Triffids* would work as an audio story. In no time at all he came back, saying that he'd mentioned this to Big Finish and they said 'Yes, please.' I was ecstatic!

How did you find the process of adapting for audio? Have you written other scripts? *The Night of the Triffids* was written in the first person – did that help the process of adapting the story?

If I can be totally honest, I've hardly written any scripts. I did write three or four scripts for *Blood of the Robots*. For a day or so I was daunted by the notion of turning my novel into a script – after all, how would I describe the action if there's one person in the scene. I couldn't very well have the character talking to himself, such as 'Now I'm going to shoot this machine gun at that Triffid.' It wouldn't have worked at all. But once I got into the writing it began to flow smoothly. What's more, I found there were things I could do with an audio drama that really brought the story alive. Yes, the book's written in the first person, so it comes across as if the hero is telling a friend, say, what happened. So it has that feeling of being 'real' events.

You went to the studio for the recording, how did you find the experience? How was the famous lunch?

Ah, you've heard about the lunches? They are terrific. There were jokes about the asparagus being Triffid shoots!

Did you have any idea of the casting decisions while you were producing the adaptation?

Being in the studio was a fantastic experience. When the actors' voices came through the speakers... not just saying, but *performing* my lines, the enormity of it all walloped me. Goosebumps. Shivers up my arms. Tingles. You name it. The actors were terrific. John kept me informed about casting decisions. He asked for suggestions. In the end, I was happy for him to cast the parts based on his suggestions because he's such an experienced producer and knows what

kind of performance makes a drama like this work.

How well do Sam Troughton (playing the main character David Maser) and Nicola Bryant (several roles) match up to your mental images?

I'd heard Sam Troughton before on some audio work and realised that one of the things he did so well was make the listener feel as if they were his friend and they were listening to something that happened to him. That seemed such an important technique to make my adaptation work. Nicola Bryant has a way of weaving emotion into her voice that is so believable and captivating. Both matched up very closely to my mental image. In fact, they added new dimensions to the characters that were as surprising as they were brilliant. 'Exceeding expectations' are the words that keep coming into my head.

What's next up for you? Any new books/audio works that we should know about?
I haven't really thought about audio work beyond *Triffids* yet. Coming up next is a novel called *Secrets of the Dead*. It involves a collection of Egyptian mummies in a castle in Devon. Of course, with it being horror, the mummies aren't content to lie there and do nothing. What's more, a local family appear to resemble, physically, those old dried-up husks wrapped up in bandages. I've been wanting to write an Egyptian mummy novel for years so really got my teeth into this one. My editor told me that this story really scared her. She's never admitted that before! +

THE NIGHT OF THE TRIFFIDS is re-released on August 7th, closely followed by its audio debut, courtesy of Big Finish, in September.



CAROLINE PREECE is...

The Girl From

PLANET



THE FADES

Since it was announced that the BBC's youth-orientated channel, BBC Three, would be leaving our television screens come Autumn 2015, a lot has been written about the move's implications and the possible effects its departure could have on UK television. The potentially negative impact on sci-fi and fantasy television output in this country has been a small part of that conversation, without ever dominating, but with the deadline drawing closer and no sign of a last minute saving grace, perhaps it's time to think about what the channel's move online could mean for genre fans like you and me.

The current drought of good genre output on British television is a point of concern right now, with only *Doctor Who* and a few others really flying the flag after several long-running series like *Misfits*, *Being Human* and *Merlin* were canned in recent years. This sort of thing always operates in peaks and troughs, of course, with the next flurry of interesting and exciting shows probably on its way imminently, but it's all too tempting to see the success of series like *Doctor Who*, especially with the 50th anniversary celebrations having just passed, and ignore the genre wasteland around it.

The loss of BBC Three will only contribute to this, with several good shows possibly going with it and its inevitable budget cuts. News of a zombie reality game-show, comedy line-up and

several documentaries has reached us, but there's still a huge question mark hanging over the fate of dramas like the excellent *In the Flesh*, despite a BAFTA win and overwhelming critical acclaim for its second series. It might yet be saved and renewed for a well-deserved third run – maybe it already has – but the lack of certainty even after its success points to a larger problem for shows like it on UK television.

When niche shows hit big, we hear a lot about it. Think *Sherlock*, which has the BBC clamouring for more episodes whenever it can get them. For everything else, survival depends on comfortable viewing figures and a general sense from critics that it's not terrible, and that's become a problem for youth-targeted series being made by BBC Three, E4 and ITV2. *The Fades*, one of the most unique and interesting fantasy-horror series in recent years, was reportedly dropped because of a lack of interest from the young audience it was trying to attract, and now that seems quite indicative of what was to happen to its home channel in 2014.

According to a recent report, both the BBC and Channel 4 have lost a "significant portion" of their young audience between 2010 and 2014. It's been argued that these 'lost' viewers may actually have just moved online instead of abandoning television completely, but it's still a notable

phenomenon that may have inadvertently hit the sci-fi and fantasy scene. Whether you buy into the brands or not, channels like BBC Three and E4 have long been home to a large proportion of new genre shows, and the loss of their audience will almost certainly translate into a drop in investment into fresh and interesting talent for the future.

It's arguable whether that elusive 18-24 demographic are actually the taste makers they're made out to be, or whether it's television executives who are actually the ones fervently making decisions around said audience to no avail. BBC Three's move to being a purely online channel is a strange case in that, for all of the messages of doom and gloom it



MISFITS

The Potential Impact of BBC Three's Ousting on UK Genre Telly



BEING HUMAN

has inspired, the channel will actually just be continuing in a different medium. Online, the same audience quadrant that has shunned programmes sometimes clumsily designed to directly appeal to them can experience content in a way more familiar to them.

The move towards watching television online and via mobile devices isn't just a myth – it's actually happening. That has been reflected in figures suggesting rapidly lowering viewership from young people. Something else that is threatening to change everything about the way we watch television is the popularisation of binge watching, which has been a huge debate ever since Netflix decided to ditch the standard week-by-week schedule with their own output, and moving excellent yet underappreciated dramas like *In the Flesh* to an environment like that could quite possibly be the best thing to ever happen to them.

But if *In the Flesh* were to be left behind on the way to iPlayer, then it would be yet another blow to UK sci-fi and fantasy fans. *The Fades* was loved enough that it's still talked about in certain circles today, but others like *Misfits* and *Being Human* were long past their place in the cultural zeitgeist by the time they finally bowed out. It could be blamed on diminishing returns, but neither show was ever legitimately bad, and having them around kept up the quota of genre output that now looks barren in comparison to just a couple of years ago.

It's not such a problem in the US, and maybe the increasing ease of access for great, buzz-worthy American series on Sky and the like is part of the problem. Similarly, targeted networks in the US like The CW and MTV have been hitting it out of the park in the last few years, with shows like *Arrow*, *Teen Wolf* and *The 100* all successfully courting an audience both

old and young. It's the exact opposite of what has been happening to equivalent output in the UK and, with a smaller pool of shows to choose from, the failure of E4 and BBC Three to recapture their former glory is even more keenly felt.

On the face of it, it doesn't feel like us genre fans want for anything right now, with a new horror, fantasy or sci-fi show seemingly premiering every other week and a mainstream acceptance that would have been unthinkable in the past. In a lot of ways, we've never had it so good, but British output of the same quality or quantity has been slowly diminishing in the meantime. It still exists, of course, with shows like *Atlantis* and *Doctor Who* fulfilling that need for a lot of genre fans. But it's *In the Flesh* that has really demonstrated British fantasy at its best – atmospheric, edgy and complex in a way that's been getting a lot of positive attention.

It's easy to view BBC Three as the home of travesties such as *Snog, Marry, Avoid* or *Danny Dyer, I Believe in UFOs*, but it has also been a place to find relatively fearless investment in big ideas and emerging talent – it would be more than a shame to lose that. What recent insights tell us is that, while many of these shows are given attention from critics and other entertainment enthusiasts, young audiences just don't seem to be as interested. By trying to target a certain demographic, these smaller channels have

inadvertently won the attention of a much older audience.

There's something about the often great shows being made and aired on UK youth-orientated channels and the actual tastes of young audiences in the country that isn't adding up, and this has resulted in the chance for the next big hit to be found a notably smaller possibility. It's an issue not limited to genre television, but one that might turn out to affect sci-fi and fantasy more than we are expecting. It's troubling, and the move takes away one of the best and underappreciated capabilities of these channels – to bring us new things that turn out to be diamonds as much as they do quickly-forgotten mistakes.

Could the move online solve that issue, or contribute to a larger problem? Funding has to be cut from somewhere, and we could view the retraction of BBC Three as a necessary evil that means we can still enjoy things like *Doctor Who* and worthwhile programming from the other BBC channels, but it also still feels like a blow for audiences that have at one time or another fallen in love with a show only to see it cancelled for unclear reasons.

With an entire channel now going the same way, its move online blamed on shrinking budgets and a fracturing audience, can we wave goodbye to the idea of finding the next *Being Human* or *Misfits*? I hope not, but it's hard not to feel a little concerned.



IN THE FLESH

THE DEMOLITION MEN

Get the lowdown on what promises to be the summer's most explosive action extravaganza,
THE EXPENDABLES 3...



by Jack Bottomley

Back in 2010, writer/director/star Sylvester Stallone did the cinematic equivalent of scouring the butchers for the biggest pieces of beef in store. His film, *The Expendables*, was a rough, tough, old school, fist-flying throwback to the watch-n-rewind days of '80s/'90s action cinema. Chock full of stars, from Stallone himself to Jet Li, and with cameos by Bruce Willis and (then governor) Arnold Schwarzenegger, this was an action fan's dream come true. The film's success not only led to the formation of the testosterone-fuelled series,

but as a bonus (in many ways) brought Schwarzenegger back onto the big screen. In 2012, *The Expendables 2* improved upon the first, with self-deprecating gags and a firm sense of giddy fun; plus there was added Jean Claude Van Damme and Chuck Norris.

The Expendables series is one that really gets the backs up of cine-snobs with its focus on laddish camaraderie over developed plotting, and wink-nudge action over deep characterisation. The recent financially

underwhelming offerings from some of the cast in sole features (Schwarzenegger's *The Last Stand*, Stallone's *Bullet to the Head*, Jason Statham's *Homefront*) have suggested the genre has moved on, and yet *The Expendables* is expanding, with no signs of slowing.

Though these movies have been built on the shoulders of the pun-dropping, body chopping action stars, this new entry actually promises a potential fresh direction for the series. The plot this time around sees Barney Ross (Stallone) and his team come



face to face with the *Expendables*' co-founder, Conrad Stonebanks (Mel Gibson). Years ago, Stonebanks went arms dealing rogue, forcing Ross to put him down; only it transpires that he isn't dead and is instead out for brutal revenge against Ross and his crew. This impending threat leads the *Expendables* to recruit some fresh blood in newer, more tech-savvy and young members of the group. So despite the fact that *The Expendables* series has focused on the seasoned veterans thus far, it seems that this new film, helmed this time by *Red Hill's* Patrick Hughes (who will next direct the US remake of *The Raid*), will also be aiming below the casting age of 50.

That being said, some may be less thrilled to hear that the film is also set to be released as PG-13 (or 12A for us), in an attempt to "reach as many people as possible," as Stallone said. "It's very close to an R, believe me, it's right there. But I think we owe it to the next generation. We thought we'd join that club for a while." Disappointed? Well, fear not because while this may well be less bloody, and absent of some actors, the casting roll call is still very much hard-arsed and impressive, as the plethora of character posters and the teaser trailer have showcased. Bruce Willis is perhaps the biggest loss to the cast, but despite his falling out (when he was refused a \$4 million salary for his 4 day shoot, diddums), there's still plenty of meat in this big, greasy, filmic kebab!

Along with the returning faces in the brilliantly named line up of Stallone's Barney Ross, Jason Statham's Lee Christmas, Jet Li's Yin Yang, Randy Couture's Toll Road, Schwarzenegger's Trench Mauzer, Dolph Lundgren's Gunner Jensen and Terry Crews' Hale Caesar, we have an eclectic mix of action idols and real-life punch-pullers. As well as Gibson's aforementioned big bad are Antonio Banderas (as new recruit, Galgo) and Wesley Snipes (as Doc). They join younger talents Kellan Lutz (hopefully on better form as John Smilee, than he was in *The Legend of Hercules*), UFC fighter Ronda

Rousey (as Luna), and boxer Victor Ortiz (as Mars). What's that? What do you mean we forgot someone? Oh, wait, of course, there's also the sassy casting of Kelsey Grammer (as Bonaparte). Ok, don't pull that face. Most excitingly, the film will also feature (cue John Williams) Dr. Jones himself, Harrison Ford, who will hopefully be breaking skulls and not ankles here as Max Drummmer. The casting process seems to take an arguably grander standing with this series than perhaps any other. From the reports that Nicolas Cage, Milla Jovovich, Jackie Chan and Steven Segal were contacted about appearing, to the confirmation that Snipes and Ford were. There's no doubting the inexplicable joy of seeing faces like these conjoined as one muscular, sweaty and badass orgy of facial surgery, tattoos and berets onscreen.

Naturally, a good cast doesn't always make for a great film (hey there, *Batman & Robin*), but if past instalments are anything to go by, we can at least expect a joyride of nostalgic action. Additionally, this third film has followed the franchise's trend of taking what you do seriously with some on-set stories rolling into headlines recently. In the past Stallone has almost killed himself to bring his fans a feature, from his life-threatening injury in *Rocky IV* (in a fight scene with Lundgren) to his dignity-threatening trauma in *Stop, or My Mom Will Shoot!* (moving swiftly on). If nothing else, *The Expendables* series shows the entire cast and crew cares about their audience and not long after this film's principal photography began in Bulgaria, in August 2013, there was a crazy on-set incident. This occurrence involved a tank with bad brakes and Jason Statham surviving a plunge into the black sea. Business as usual then! Past films in the series have led to hospitalisation (Stallone breaking his neck in the first movie), and worse (stunt man Kun Liu's tragic death in the second film), so we can all respect this aspect of the series at least.

The Expendables films may not offer great depth but they play directly and successfully to a rabid audience. Thus far, the films





have taken very healthy profits worldwide: *The Expendables* grossed \$274,470,394 (on an \$80 million budget) and *The Expendables 2* took \$305,428,192 (on a \$100 million budget). The PG-13 direction taken here suggests that producers were underwhelmed by the sequel's box office performance and are keen on taking a bit more business this time round. With the talks of series producer Avi Lerner's possible all-female spin-off dubbed *The Expendabelles* (rumoured to be aiming for the likes of Sigourney Weaver, Gina Carano and Meryl Streep; again we shit you not) and further *Expendables* sequels planned (former Bond Pierce Brosnan and legendary wrestler Hulk Hogan – "brother!" – have already apparently signed up to part 4), it seems that expectations are still high.

Nevertheless, let's not shoot without aiming, for we have to see where the franchise stands come August. Indeed, the shot of new blood could be a blessing or a curse, but from the trailer footage and cheekily similar

font style, this third film seems to be taking a page out of the recently rejuvenated (and thankfully sillier) *Fast & Furious* series' book. You could argue that a dose of youthful energy could be the Viagra needed to ensure the extension (ahem) of this surprisingly fun and enjoyable series. *The Expendables 3* should offer the requisite action thrills and spills, let's hope it has the humour to match and utilises the stars at its disposal. This atypical revenge plot may well not open up the series to any fresh plot territory, but it does provide the chance to see Rocky tussle with Riggs, and could allow some young guns to take the crown as new action icons. Come next month, the boys are back in town and they're armed and dangerous. Let's just hope they aren't low on ammo; although when a cast crashes the Cannes Film Festival in a tank (Google it), they can pretty much do anything!

THE EXPENDABLES 3 assaults cinemas from August 14th, and will be reviewed in a future issue.



HORROR
Obscura

This month, the malformed Martin Unsworth explores a trio of overlooked films starring the legendary Paul Naschy...

NA SCHY GETS THE HUMP



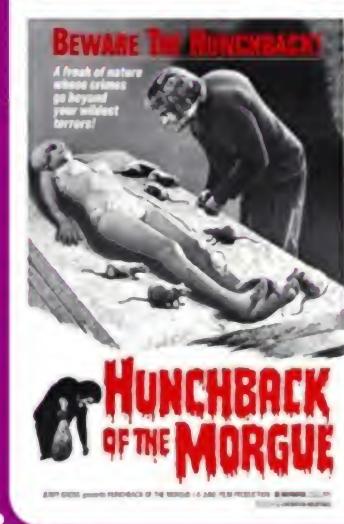
Had he lived, Spanish

actor/director/writer Jacinto

Molina Álvarez, better known as Paul

Naschy, would have been celebrating his eightieth birthday in September. A major player in Spanish cinema, particularly in horror – a genre he had loved since first seeing the Universal monster movies of the thirties – his career spanned five decades and, although many of his films were dismissed as

cheesy trash, he inspired a legion of fans, both in the business and the audience. Naschy's most famous roles, such as the werewolf Waldemar Daninsky in a long-running series of films, overshadowed some other remarkable features. They may not be the most artistic nor accomplished films, but they are very



BEWARE THE HUNCHBACK

A freak of nature whose crimes go beyond your wildest terrors!

HUNCHBACK OF THE MORGUE

ALFREDO GUTIÉRREZ: PRODUCCIÓN DE LA MORGUE / A JAB-PEPE PRODUCTION © 1973



entertaining, which is everything when it comes to this genre. Collaborating with director Javier Aguirre, he made three films, rarely seen in the UK, but with enough charm to merit the effort of tracking them down.

In Hunchback of the Morgue (El jorobado de la Morgue, 1973) Naschy plays the stooped Wolfgang Gotho, who works (unsurprisingly) in a hospital morgue as an assistant. An odd job man basically. And over the course of the film, he does some very odd jobs. The film opens in a Bavarian tavern as two rivals attempt to out-drink each other. They each chug on an enormous glass of beer while an annoying man plays an accordion in the background. Handsome and cocksure Udo (Fernando Solóteua) is the victor, as the other passes out after one glass. He's a little worse for wear too, and even turns down the attentions of a nice buxom lady. Staggering home, he bumps into Gotho, slurring insults and degrading him. Just as he makes it to the door, the alcohol gets the better of him and he drops dead. Gotho takes him to his workplace, and joyously prepares his body for the medical students. This involves removing his head, hands, and feet in graphic close-up. Despite his misshapen body, Gotho still

has a normal face, and a good heart. He visits an old school friend, Ilse (María Elena Arpón) who is dying from tuberculosis in the hospital. He takes her a bouquet of flowers every day. On one trip, a group of student orderlies pick on him and mock him, albeit in a rather effeminate manner. Gotho attempts to attack the ringleader, but they all close ranks and knock him to the ground. Unfortunately, this makes him too late to see Ilse, as she passes away the moment before he gets there. When the attendants take her body to the morgue, Gotho is enraged to see them joke and steal her necklace. He attacks them, swinging a cleaver - severing the head of one, and disembowelling the other, his intestines spilling out like uncooked, bloodied sausage.

He convinces himself that Ilse is merely in a deep sleep, and takes her body away, putting her in a forgotten underground catacomb previously used to hide escaped Jews in WWII and even further back by the Inquisition; torture equipment and human remains are still present. Laying her down, he goes to stalk the student who had caused him to miss seeing Ilse. Stuffing a bouquet of flowers in his mouth, he grunts, "Breathe the aroma because it will be the last smell of your life". When he

returns to the lair, he finds hundreds of rats making a meal of Ilse's body. Enraged, he attempts to beat them off, but they leap at him ferociously, leaving him no option but to set light to them with his flaming torch. The rats were not fed for days, and Naschy's clothes were covered with what he referred to as 'horse grease', so they could achieve the wild effect. They used different rats to cover Arpón while she's lying being gnawed by the vermin, naturally. It's a deeply controversial scene, more so today than it was at the time as real rats are filmed jumping and running around on fire. We can assume they were not specially trained stunt rats, with little flame retardant costumes. It's no doubt one of the reasons the film has never been released officially in the UK, and is quite disturbing; it's certainly not recommended inviting any animal rights supporters to a screening. Naschy did express his regret at this scene later.

In the meantime, the police are investigating the evisceration of the porters and the finger points squarely at Gotho, who by this time has decided to enlist the help of a professor from the lab, Dr. Orla (Euro-horror regular Alberto Dalbés). Thinking he can help wake Ilse, he is coerced into aiding Orla with his



insane experiment. This happens to be using various organs and body parts to create a new, living organism. Not in the old Frankenstein way, however. That would be far too straightforward. The human bits and pieces are placed in a large jar, which begins to pulsate and expand before eventually growing into an artificially created flesh-hungry primordial monster. It's a very Lovecraft-esque idea and the sight of the ever-expanding blob of matter in the container is truly a nightmarish one. As it grows, they used an octopus stuffed into the jar to create a realistic mass of blubber. Gotho manages to bring the doctor's equipment into the lair with the help of some hired goons who, like the rest of the town, give Gotho no respect. So, from what appears to have been a nice tale of an outcast murderous hunchback, the film has turned into a mad scientist flick. It's not the end of the slaughter, of course, as Gotho must procure the needed parts. This includes a grisly beheading of a corpse in the mortuary. There are many rumours and conjectures about this sequence, as it turns out the filmmakers had permission to use an actual corpse. Naschy recalls having to down two stiff drinks, before cutting into the cadaver's head. In the finished film, we see a close up of the

blade cutting the corpse's throat, with some added blood, but once he removes the head, it's entirely a special effect prop. Naschy admitted he couldn't go through with severing the actual corpse's head, despite Aguirre's encouragement and the mortician's approval.

It's not long before Orla's thuggish helpers drunkenly decide to dispose of Ilse's now rancid corpse in the convenient acid pit that is in the makeshift laboratory. Naturally mortified that his friend is truly gone, Gotho throws one of them into the acid; loose pieces of flesh floating to the surface. Another has acid thrown in his face, which shoulders away while he writhes in agony. Gotho crushes the other in an iron maiden, and then ties them both together so the acid-scared man has to carry the corpse of his friend aimlessly around, unable to find the exit, putrefying together in the maze-like tunnels. Manipulating Gotho, Orla convinces him to continue helping with a promise of a new, synthetically created, friend. The police are getting suspicious about the continuous missing pieces of corpses, so Orla suggests to Gotho that it is safer to get 'fresh' meat, and sends him for the girls in the nearby "women's reformatory". Earlier, we had seen one of the young girls

beating and flagellating another, but it never goes as seedy as the Jess Franco 'encaged women' films. Surprisingly, Elke (Rosanna Yanni), the head nurse, has something of a soft spot for the poor hunchback. She was kind to him after his attack, and as a mark of gratitude for her attention, he brings her flowers too, and subserviently kisses her feet. While it's rather absurd that a beautiful woman would fall for such an unfortunate, one has to bear in mind that Naschy also co-wrote the film, and it's a fairly common trait that he 'gets the girl' at some point. However, it also gives the film a subtle message of accepting those who are different, however missshapen or simple-minded they may be. "Once in a while, faithfulness and love surpass beauty", she tells him. It is pushing credibility when a naked Elke takes Gotho (who strangely keeps his clothes on) to bed at one point, though. According to Naschy, the scene was originally longer and he revealed his large lump (on his back, of course), but censorship troubles meant it was excised, and the footage lost. It was also filmed with Yanni fully clothed for certain markets, but this is widely available on the various DVD releases. It's a shame the climax is so routine, as all that proceeded was so fantastic and full of character, but it's still

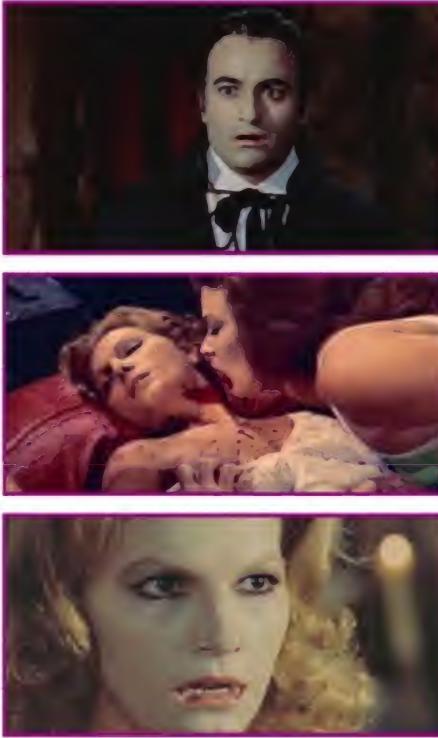
SHE'S THE KIND OF A GIRL YOU CAN SINK YOUR TEETH INTO.



DRACULA'S
GREAT LOVE

PAUL NASCHY HAYDÉE POLITOFF ROSANA YANNI
DIRECTED BY J. AGUIRRE

R RESTRICTED



an entertaining romp, even if the synthetic monster Orla produces resembles the lumbering mummy Rubbatiti from *Carry On Scream* (1966).

Yes, the film is full of complete nonsense (the dialogue is particularly ludicrous), but it's the craziness of it that makes it so much fun, despite descending to quite sleazy levels (or perhaps even because of it). Nevertheless, Naschy's portrayal of Gotho is brilliant, particularly in the original language version. He had the idea for the character after meeting a real hunchback who was working in a morgue they used in another film. On the DVD commentary, Naschy claims, "He loved corpses. I talked to this man and he showed me everything, all the corpses"; he adds that they later sent the man to jail as he was having sex with the female cadavers, something he had apparently admitted to Naschy!

Always an underrated actor, Naschy subtly conveys the character's inner turmoil and tragedy; he is a simple-minded man with a physical affliction, but is also very caring and humble beyond words. The look of pain when pleading the doctor to revive his friend, and more so when her body is disposed of, is heartbreaking. The heinous acts he commits are a response to his treatment by

the outside world more than psychopathic tendency. Tormented in the street by most of the village, from young children (who pelt him with stones) to the more 'civilised' elders, it's no wonder he snaps.

The film brought much acclaim Naschy's way and it's widely considered the best of his horror films; the portrayal of Gotho earned him a Best Acting Award at the 1973 Paris Convention of Fantastic Cinema. Very much in the style of the old Universal films of the thirties and forties, only with added gore, the film is incredibly atmospheric, and makes great use of the Gothic locations.

Both Naschy and Yanni would appear in Aguirre's other horror film, *Count Dracula's Great Love* (El gran amor del conde Drácula, 1973) which, like Hunchback, is an atmospheric and entertaining film, despite often being dismissed and ridiculed for being 'cheesy'. Naschy is the titular vampire, reincarnated as Doctor Wendell Marlow, who has purchased an old sanatorium in the wilds of Spain. Even before the titles, we have seen a pair of pilfering baggage handlers slaughtered by an unseen assailant. One has his throat torn open, while the other has a hatchet buried in his forehead in graphic close-up.

It's actually a rather impressive effect, but the atmosphere is ruined by looping his fall down some stairs several times under the opening credits. The amiable Doctor takes in a stranded group of travellers whose carriage has broken. While he is away during the day (we wonder why) the women explore the house and find a journal written by Van Helsing, in which it explains that Dracula didn't perish. It's not long before the buffoonish thief from the opening scene is turning the guests into vampires. Dracula has a very precise agenda: he plans to revive his dead daughter. Naturally, this must involve some ritual sacrifice and mass slaughter, but Naschy's Count takes a much more romantic approach. In order to achieve his daughter's resurrection, he must torture and kill a virgin, and find true love with a woman who will fall for him without the need of his hypnotic powers. All in a night's work, we suppose. Mind you, he does have a couple of the women throwing themselves at him. Especially Senta (Yanni) who seduces him after getting her foot caught in one of his traps. He casts her aside when it's clear she's been with other men. Meanwhile, Karen (Haydée Politoff) has fallen for him in a big way, particularly when he saves her from a vampire attack.



It's a completely off-the-wall interpretation of the famous bloodsucker, particularly once the Prince of Darkness side emerges following Karen's declared love, and he goes full-on cloak, fangs and widow's peak hairstyle. When he is Wendell, he's eloquent, suave and genuinely kind, even going so far as setting free a rabbit caught in a trap. When in Dracula form he hardly ever talks, instead his voice comes as narrated thought. Channelling Bela Lugosi (even using the old 'using the cloak to cover the biting' trick), Naschy is clearly living his boyhood dreams. It's strange then that the Count renounces all his evil intentions for the chance of true love with Karen.

Like many Euro-horror of the seventies, it's a film full of eroticism. The women look stunning and several become vampires, after which they naturally explore their sexuality before devouring Senta in such a typically passionate and sensual manner, Ingrid Pitt herself would blush. The shots of the women roaming the sanatorium and the grounds are beautifully shot; once Dracula has appeared and he and the women go stalking victims a real sense of otherworldliness prevails. A marvellous sequence of him bedding Karen moves from the couple entwined under the covers to a large mirror where we see just the

one body writhing about in passion. It's not without its flaws, of course. There are some major malfunctions of the night filter on the camera, giving the impression of the vampires wandering around on an overcast day. There's also the awkwardness of Dracula's complete about-face towards the end, particularly as Karen refuses to stay as a vampire and he immediately thrusts a large stake into his own heart.

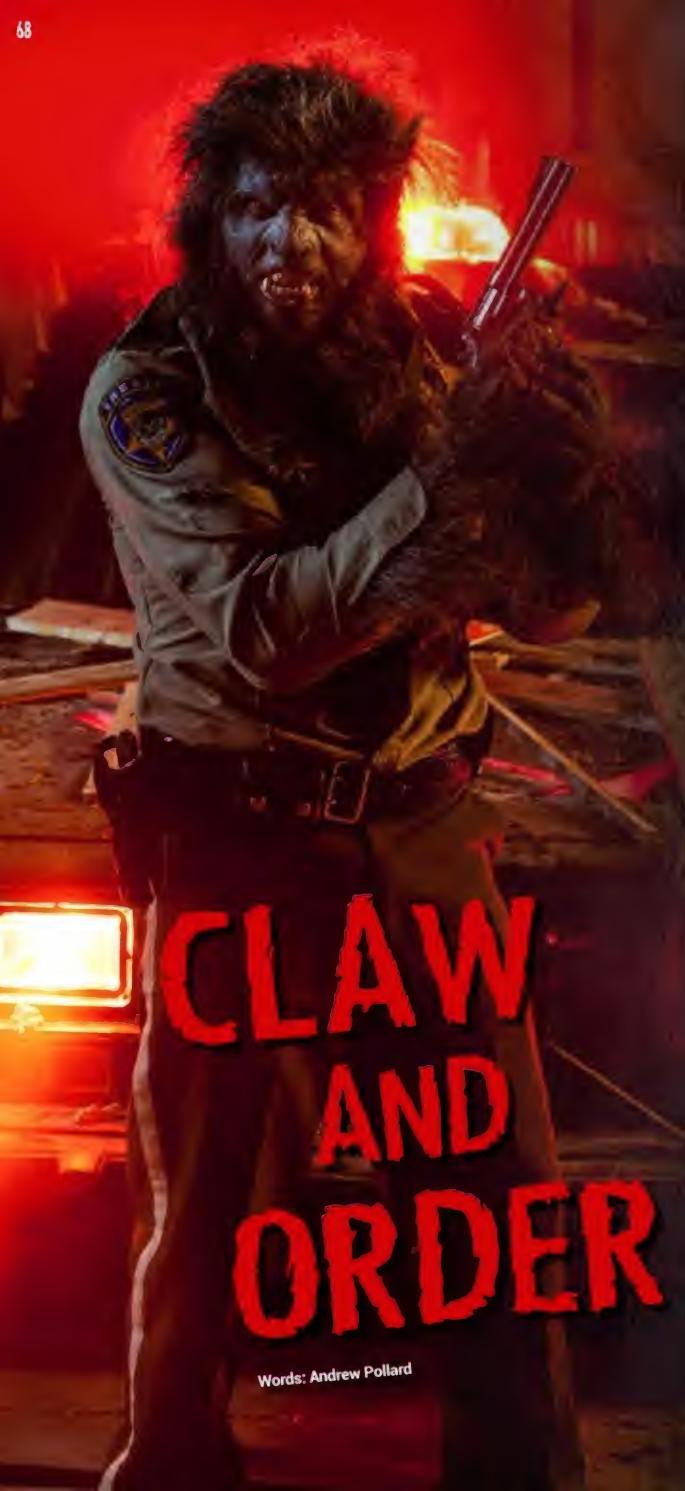
Count Dracula's Great Love had a UK VHS release in the days before the video nasty clampdown, under the more salacious title Dracula's Virgin Lovers. Released by Iver Film Services (whose logo was a copy of the Oscar Academy Award, duping renters into thinking their films were award-worthy no doubt) it featured a suitably child-scaring cover - which, as was always the case, gave the unsuspecting public the idea the film was more graphic than it was. To make matters worse, the still was actually from Hunchback of the Morgue!

Although his role is only small, Naschy later worked again with Aguirre on the murder-mystery, *El asesino está entre los trece* (The Killer is Among the Thirteen, 1976). With a setup straight out of Agatha Christie, a group of strangers accept an invitation to an isolated mansion from a woman looking

to find out who murdered her husband. It's a talky but wonderfully atmospheric thriller, which builds to a frantic, blood-soaked final half hour. Naschy plays the household's shifty driver-cum-handyman, who spends more time bedding the cleaner than being a chauffeur. Although he is only on screen a short time, he still has an imposing presence. The amazing cast reads like a who's who of cult Euro-stars: Jack Taylor, Patty Shepard (who appeared several times with Naschy), Simón Andreu (who appeared in the Luciano Ercoli giallo films), Eusebio Poncela (The Cannibal Man, 1973), and Carmen Maura (Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, 1988). While not straight horror, it straddles the mystery and giallo subgenres in an entertaining and absorbing way.

Naschy's success in cult cinema has guaranteed his place in horror history, and he left such a rich collection of films that inevitably there are some gems still to discover. We will return to him again soon, without a doubt.





Words: Andrew Pollard

Canadian horror/comedy *WOLFCOP* is the brilliantly crazed tale of an alcoholic law enforcer who turns into a werewolf. We were lucky enough to grab some time with writer/director **LOWELL DEAN** to talk about the joys of practical effects, superheroes, horror staples, the already-confirmed *WOLFCOP 2* and lycanthropic penis transformations. As you do.

STARBURST: *WolfCop* is certainly a bizarre concept. Just where did the idea come from?

Lowell Dean: It was an idea I had a couple of years ago. I was working on two different scripts, one was a werewolf movie and one was a cop movie. I joked about smashing them together, then when I saw a werewolf in a cop outfit in my mind, I thought this could be really cool. So I went from there and I started working on the script. I wrote a script and pulled together a team - I partnered with a local production company called Echolanda Creative - and recruited about forty volunteers, then we shot our concept trailer. We did this concept trailer and we used that to try and raise financing.

How difficult was it to raise finance?
 Really hard, actually. We were having a hard time finding people who would wanna finance a movie called *WolfCop*. That's why we did the trailer, to show what would be in the movie, because a title like that could get really old really quickly and be a one-note joke. Our trailer was designed to show a bit of the backstory, the occult, and also that it's going to feature a badass, almost anti-hero/superhero. So we took that trailer around and we got turned down a few times by a few funding agencies. Then we heard about this thing called CineCoup. Basically, CineCoup is like American Idol, but for filmmaking in Canada. It almost felt like fate as they asked for people to submit a trailer, which we'd just done. Anyone across Canada could submit a trailer, so we submitted ours - we were one of ninety across the country. We had to compete with other filmmakers, get votes online for our project, and become the one selected. And the winner of CineCoup was going to get a \$1 million budget and a guaranteed theatrical release in Cineplex cinemas in Canada. That's huge! Canadian filmmakers don't get a movie in the theatre. So we said let's go for it, then we spent three months trying to sing and dance and sell our movie, and we got lucky - our movie was selected!

So is CineCoup just a one-off or is that an annual thing?

It was the first ever, but I think they intend to do it annually. They're a bit of a smaller outfit, so all the energy that went into *CineCoup* went into *WolfCop* and helping us promote and market it. Now that *WolfCop* is done, I wouldn't be surprised if they announce Season 2 of *CineCoup* in the next few weeks. It's a really great way to get films made and more importantly promoted. We started building an audience

before we made a movie. People were asking where they could watch the movie before we even starting shooting.

You were working initially on a werewolf movie and a cop movie, but were there ever any thoughts of having a different horror creature involved rather than a werewolf? It was always a werewolf, for me. It was gonna be a different werewolf movie rather than a different monster. In the last five years, I've just gotten frustrated, as a lover of werewolves, that werewolves aren't represented. I feel like it's a goldmine character that people are ignoring. I watch shows like *True Blood*, it's a fun show, but *True Blood*, *Twilight*... a werewolf is just a shirtless guy who digitally morphs into this role. That's not what a werewolf is! I grew up on, when I was really young, *Teen Wolf*, then *An American Werewolf in London*. I want a monster, I want a wolf-man!

Half of the charm of the film is the practical effects work. Was it always your plan to go the practical route or was that dictated by the budget?

Definitely, I love practical effects. I'm pretty old-school in that respect. And yes, when you have the budget then it sometimes forces you into those choices. Practical effects are the way to go, especially at this budget level. And it doesn't hurt that one of my best friends is Emersen Ziffle, who is a practical effects artist. Before I even had the script finished, we went for coffee and talked how we were going to bring this thing to life. Maybe if one of my best friends was a V-effects artist it would've gone different [laughs]. But at this budget level, it's not even a budget thing, I love that it's practical, and I don't mean on just an effects level. It's a beautiful thing when I can just stand there just a few feet from *WolfCop*'s face and be, like, "Goddamn, you look amazing!" There's no mystery - it's real, it feels real and it's different when you're watching it.

Given the emphasis on practical effects,



how key were the transformation moments to you?

Very important. If there was a checklist of five things that we had to not screw up, that was number one. Before I even had the script finished, Emersen and I were sat around, talking, having coffee, and looking at our favourite transformations and how do we set ourselves apart and homage them within our budget. One of the first things I said was that we're never gonna be able to compete and go toe-to-toe with *An American Werewolf in London* in terms of scope, so let's just pick one thing. I said kinda crudely, because of the tone of our movie, that I'd never seen a werewolf dick transformation.

And that's how Lou's transformation

starts, which is something that wasn't exactly expected...

And that's what we wanted to do. We can't go bigger so what haven't we seen before? And I'd never seen a werewolf dick transform, so I said to make it look really practical, really visceral, really painful, really gross... but let's make it a dick.

That's certainly novel, as is *Lou Garou/WolfCop*'s issues with alcohol. When you initially had the scripts for two different films, were the booze problems part of the cop movie?

Actually, they were always in the werewolf movie rather than the cop movie. When I think about werewolves, I think of the classic scene of a guy waking up in a wheat field with a little bit of blood on him and not knowing where he was. And I thought, that reminds me of kind of a black-out drunk. When you're doing a movie like this, when it's a light-hearted tone, there's something to play with; this guy's used to waking up not knowing where he is. Any normal person wakes up and wonders why there in a field, but he wakes up in a field or a strange bed and isn't surprised.

As far as werewolves go, *WolfCop* is coherent and aware of what's going on around him. What influenced that decision? I wanted a hero. That was one of the big things for me - I was sick of werewolves being henchmen. I didn't wanna make him full *Teen Wolf*, where he's winning a basketball game, but I wanted him to retain enough humanity. That was even important in the design of his look, that he's a monster but he's a monster that retains just enough about who he is to know that he's going to fight crime. He's not gonna do big monologues or Shakespeare-style soliloquies, but if he



Amy Matysio, Leo Fafard and Aiden Devine

picks up a gun then he knows who to shoot at.

When the first poster and images surfaced for *WolfCop*, it instantly grabbed the attention. With the chance of it being pigeonholed, how concerned were you in making the movie more than just a gimmick?

Very concerned. That was my obsession for a year. I knew that we couldn't rest on our laurels and people might see it just for the name, but my goal, from the very beginning, the whole team's goal, was to have people come in to the theatre and walk out saying, "Holy shit, that was actually a good movie!" A lot of work was put into not phoning it in. I worked a lot on the script and worked a lot with CineCoup to make sure there was added depth; just worked with finding that right tone and not going so far slapstick that everything is just a joke... but then not going too serious that people think we're making a bad movie and don't know what we're doing. So we had to walk that line, that tightrope.

And what has the response been to the movie over in Canada?

Surprisingly good - I'm always amazed. I would say the majority of reviews are positive, especially genre fans or genre sites. People get what we're going for and I think they appreciate it. It was released theatrically in summer, which is a hard time for a \$1 million werewolf movie, right? Because we can't compete with *Transformers!* [Laughs.] But we still got quite an audience and a couple of weeks in theatres, and we're getting some festival love now from what I hear. I think the reaction has been good, and we've announced a sequel.

How are things looking for an international release now?

Yeah, we've been picked up. Raven Banner is doing our international distribution, and I believe we're going to, like, fifteen territories. I'm pretty sure it's going all over the place. We're going to be with StudioCanal in the UK.



When you were writing *WolfCop*, what inspired you to bring the occult into matters?

That came out of my research on werewolf films. In the first draft of the script I was working on it was actually a bite, the classic werewolf bite [that caused the affliction], but then I kinda felt like it was 'been there, done that'. So I was researching the werewolf history and mythology - when you do *WolfCop* you need to do your research - and I came across in old Hollywood how it was always the curse. Whether you want it or not, you're chosen or you're selected and it takes a little bit of moral work. It's not just like one thing happens in one moment. I love the idea that there's a plan and a mystery and something deeper to uncover, not just in this movie, but in the sequels.

With a sequel already announced, where is *WolfCop* 2 at right now and is there anything you can give away at this stage?

I'm writing it now. I can't give too much away, but I hope that it'll be a little bigger and a little crazier. We jokingly say dirtier and hairier, but definitely *WolfCop* will meet his match in terms of a villain.

And are you sticking with a world that has just a werewolf or will there be other monsters?

That's a good question and I'm not gonna answer it [laughs]. People will be pretty excited when they see what he's up against.

The effects will all be kept practical again?

Oh, definitely. Even if we get a bigger budget, my goal is not to do it unless it has to be done, like a screen replacement or a sky replacement.

With the cast and crew that you put together, how easy was it to sell them on the idea of *WolfCop*?

Very easy. The whole community here, literally, as soon as I said the name *WolfCop*... regardless of how it turns out, it was guaranteed fun, [but] it was a really hard shoot. We had a seventeen-day shoot and we were shooting six pages a day.

These things all depend on success, but when you first came up with the concept of *WolfCop* did you hope that you could

establish it as a franchise?

Yeah, definitely. That was how we were pitching it to CineCoup. That's one of the reasons we were standing out; we weren't just saying 'we're selling a movie', we were selling a franchise. We said that if this was done correctly then it's not just one *WolfCop*, there's more.

Will the sequel be shot in Canada with the same cast and crew again?

Yeah, I think for the most part. There'll be a couple of new places, but it'll be the same world and the same characters. It'll go a little deeper with the mythology.

So do you have plenty of ideas for even further *WolfCop* films if called upon?

I have at least four that I could pretty much flesh out and do if I had the time and money. So there's number two, which kind of also leads off to possibly a number three, then there's a bit of a weird one-off movie that I'd like to do. That's kind of a standalone *WolfCop* movie. I think there's a lot of places to go with it. Just think of cop movies you like or monster movies you like and you have double the opportunities to spin them together.

What films influenced you growing up and got you to where you're at?

I loved superhero films and horror films. Movies that I really loved in my childhood were Richard Donner's *Superman*, *Back to the Future*, *Evil Dead*, *RoboCop*... those are the movies that I devoured as a kid and just watched them over and over and over.

You're working on *WolfCop* 2 at the moment, but what else do you have lined up right now? Well just because they want it for next year, I'm kinda putting all of my energy into *WolfCop* again. But I have several other feature length horror films that I'd like to do, that I've already written. Then there's a few other ideas that I haven't written yet but have outlines for. I'd love to play in this horror/comedy world for a while.

So you see yourself sticking in the genre for now?

It's a really fun place to be. I love just



Len Fafard as Lou Garou/WolfCop

I WATCH SHOWS LIKE TRUE BLOOD. THAT'S NOT WHAT A WEREWOLF IS! I WANT A MONSTER. I WANT A WOLF-MAN!

making movies in general so I'd love to expand and do other things - horror, comedy, superheroes, action - because you can work in so many other things. In a way, *WolfCop* is kind of a superhero origin story.

On that note, if you were approached and could do any film you want, be it a horror, a superhero movie, whatever, what would you do?

I love superhero films, so I would love to do a big-budget superhero film. I'm a massive geek, so living in this geek-driven Hollywood time, I know a lot of people think it's lame, but for me it's kind of the dream to know that could possibly, if you were a working director, do a *Star Wars* movie or do a Batman or a Superman or play in someone else's sandbox. But I also love doing my own movies.

A lot of credit has to go to Marvel Studios on that front. Despite uncertainty on whether Iron Man, Thor, and Captain America would transition well to the big screen, Marvel and Disney have regularly knocked it out of the park... And it comes down a lot to the directors, like getting Kenneth Branagh and putting him on Thor, or getting Joe Johnson from *The Rocketeer* for *Captain America*...

We did think there may be a bit of a wobble with the recent *Ant-Man* debacle... Yeah, that was too bad. That's the first time where I was questioning Marvel. Edgar Wright, to me he can do no wrong.

So who were your favourite superheroes as a kid?

I loved Superman but I feel that they never get him right. Richard Donner's was amazing, but since then nobody can crack him because modern audiences find him boring.

Superman's similar to Captain America in the way that he's so clean cut, all-American, this flawless persona...

But they cracked it [*Captain America*], which proves to me that it can be done. They made *Captain America* so great. And I loved Spider-Man, and mostly Batman and the X-Men. It's funny, I feel like as a comic kid you grew up through comics. When I was really young it was Superman, then when you're a teenager it was Marvel because they have the real-world problems with the X-Men and Spider-Man. You know who else I think they haven't gotten great in a feature film? It's the Hulk. With Mark Ruffalo, they should do a kick-ass Hulk movie.

It's a hard one to balance with the Hulk. Ang Lee's *Hulk* was really good in certain ways but there wasn't enough 'Hulk Smash' for most, then Louis Leterrier's *The Incredibles* Hulk had plenty of 'Smash' but maybe went too far the other way...

Yeah, I thought it went too far the other way. It was like they were trying to cancel out the Ang Lee one, like 'Ed Norton sad, Hulk smash.' That's your movie. But I love that character; that was a big one when I was a kid.

How about horror characters? If you could take hold of one of the franchises out there, which would it be?

I think Freddy would be fun, and I'd also... I know it's not full-on horror... but I'd love to do a *Gremlins* movie. I don't even know if they need to reboot it, just give someone



else the story and it's just a continuation that doesn't really have to make a big deal out of the previous ones.

And how precious do you find yourself with the *WolfCop* character at this stage? What if somebody wanted to take it out of your hands?

It would be hard for me right now because it's still my baby and I've been living in that character's world for a couple of years. In a few years, if I felt like I had said what I needed to say with *WolfCop*, I would rather someone else continue him than he didn't exist. I hope he's in a comic, I hope he's living on in a videogame, I hope he lives on in people's hearts!

Or you could go the whole *Leprechaun* route and have *WolfCop* go to space, to Vegas, back to 'da hood...

You know what's funny, they're not all absurd ideas. Even when you say them, I can picture *WolfCop* doing them!

WOLFCOP has its UK premiere at **FILM 4 FRIGHTFEST** on August 22nd, and will be released later in the year by StudioCanal. Be sure to follow Lowell Dean on Twitter @lolofilm for further news on his projects.





THE WIZARDS OF AUS'



Adventure gamebooks were a big thing in the '80s, combining the fun of a good book with Dungeons and Dragons style gaming. Now, thanks to smartphone technology, they're back in a big way. Leading the charge are TIN MAN GAMES, the world's number one producer of gamebook adventures for your iPhone or Android device. We caught up with creative director NEIL RENNISON, the man responsible for bringing FIGHTING FANTASY to a whole new generation, to ask him about TIN MAN's forthcoming releases APPOINTMENT WITH F.E.A.R., the new version of WARLOCK ON FIRETOP MOUNTAIN and much more...

Words: Ed Fortune

STARBURST: How did Tin Man come about?

Neil Rennison: I was a 3D artist for many years building racetracks for games like Need For Speed, as well as a lot of ports of stuff for handhelds like the PSP. In 2008 I used the money from that to move to Australia and started Tin Man Games. I teamed up with Ben Britten Smith who is also based in Melbourne. He's an American guy and I'm an Englishman, so obviously we formed a company in Australia. One of the things we wanted to do was to see what sort of games we could make for handheld. I just thought to myself "Hey, those Fighting Fantasy books from back in the day were pretty amazing, they'd work in a digital platform." I got together a bunch of writers and illustrators that I knew from the industry and we started creating Gamebook Adventures.

Why gamebooks?

We asked ourselves "Who is our market?" and we had to go for the nostalgia people, those in their thirties and forties, mostly men – though we have a lot of female readers. I'm very happy to say that we're reading

this sort of stuff when they were ten years old. Basically, me, I'm the market. I also knew that market had grown up. Since the Fighting Fantasy books in the eighties, things have changed so much; we've had the *Lord of the Rings* movies made, we've had *World of Warcraft* be amazingly successful all around the world and more recently, *Game of Thrones*. So the expectation of what fantasy offers people is probably a little more mature. With Gamebook Adventures, we wanted them wordier and more epic in terms of scope and narrative, quite dense novels. It's actually my old *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* second edition world that I designed when I was about fifteen. It's really amazing, I've got writers and artists populating this world that I created twenty-five years ago.

What challenges did you face designing the game?

Gamebook design is a bit of a dark art. It's one of those things where getting that balance right is really important. We've generally been successful on most of our titles. The wonderful thing about digital, of course, is that we can go back and tweak things. If we get loads of people saying "this is too hard", I can go back and tweak the mechanics to make it slightly easier.

The Strange Loves gamebooks are very different from the others. Where did that come from?

Strange Loves came from a friend of Ben's that we met at Pax East, called Miellyn Fitzwater Barrows. We got talking and she said that she'd really want to write for us but wasn't really into the Sword and Sorcery stuff. We were out for drinks in Boston one night and we came to the conclusion that it would be really fun to write a semi-satirical choice your own adventure book based on supernatural romance.

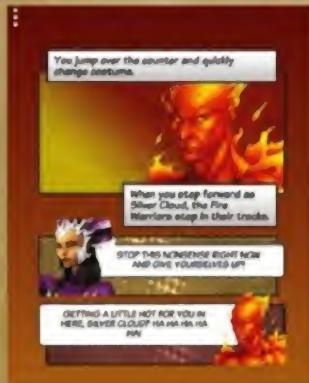
How did you get into developing the Fighting Fantasy apps?

Ian [Livingstone] and Steve [Jackson] have

been amazing and so, so supportive for us. I think Ian and Steve could see what we were doing with Gamebook Adventures and that we were building an audience of our own and building a technology to play gamebooks on digital devices. When the licence came up for grabs, it was Ian who approached me initially about doing it. They were really supportive and we're always in touch. In fact, just ten minutes ago I got an email from Ian about Caverns of Snow Witch.

How has the Fighting Fantasy fandom responded?

Fantastically well. A lot of them were following us when we were just producing Gamebook Adventures and when we got the Fighting Fantasy licence they were really pleased. It also means a lot of people who



were only into *Fighting Fantasy* came and found us. It's meant that we have introduced gamebooks to a whole new readership; we've got a lot of really young players that weren't alive in the eighties; they'd never heard of gamebooks. There are a lot of keen younger readers out there.

How do you choose what to bring out next? It's a little bit driven by what Ian and Steve want to see out there, it's a little bit driven by what I want to see out there and what the rest of the team want to see out there. It's also driven by what we feel will sell well. When we signed the licence, the first thing they asked me was which book would I like to see first. Straight away I said *House of Hell*, because I am a horror geek. Though we did *Blood of the Zombies* first to celebrate the 25th anniversary and then we did *House of Hell* next.

There was a rumour recently that Tin Man might be handling a Games Workshop licence. Can you tell us more?

We have been in discussion with them very recently, yes. We're quite big fans of *Warhammer 40,000*.

Are gamebooks back?

Not just back but thriving. I would like to think that we've been a little bit instrumental in that. There's a lot of people doing interesting things in the game space, and expanding on it too. It's not just about the sword and sorcery; there's people doing some really interesting stuff with interactive fiction. I think the technology is out there to really make it evolve. We're doing some interesting stuff with *Appointment With F.E.A.R.*, where we are pushing our own way of doing things.

Tell us more about *Appointment With F.E.A.R.* We've been doing good with our gamebook releases with regular releases and people love them. We have an audience. We are very



conscious that our audience is quite niche, so it's time for us to look beyond and see if we can do something new with the medium. One of the things we're trying to change is the way it's presented. At the moment what you have is a book inside your tablet; we even have the page numbers in there and the dice roll on top of the page. So what we're trying to do is attract people who might be put off by the 'bookiness' of it, and we've noticed that there is a growing audience of people who are looking at interactive fiction presented in new ways. Underneath the skin of it all, it's still the same thing, it's just presented differently. Our first attempt at doing this is with Steve Jackson's *Appointment with F.E.A.R.* It's a comic book-based book. It was one of my favourites growing up, and we thought it was the ideal book to experiment with. Ben spent about six months developing a new framework which *Appointment with F.E.A.R.* will use. We're losing the page numbers, the dice, everything that makes it feel like a paper-based gamebook. The interactive narrative will appear in a comic book format with the panels sliding in. The narrative is driven by character dialogue rather than the usual novelised style. We've had to do a lot of rewriting and adding a lot of new stuff. We liken it to a sort of gamebook Twitter feed, making it more accessible for those who don't like reading walls of text. We think it will work really well and we're about 80% done with it. It's looking great.

So how will combat work in this new style? You'll enter a combat and it's choice based. So you can go for an upper-cut or use your energy blast to blast a hole in their head or something. All of the dialogue will be specific to the hero that you've chosen.

You also do gamebooks for Rebellion, who own *Judge Dredd*. Will we see this new style cross over to *Mega-City One*? Our first *Judge Dredd* game was a traditional gamebook and we have a second *Dredd* gamebook written and ready to adapt to

this new style, so expect to see a very visual *Dredd* game coming down the pipe.

The same people who produced *Dredd* also produced an adventure game comic strip called *Dice Man*. Any chance we'll see that? I've had chats about *Dice Man*. The thing with it is that it's difficult. *Appointment with F.E.A.R.* is a gamebook that looks like a comic book, but it's still not a comic book. *Dice Man* is designed with panels like a comic book. We could probably do it. We'd have to see if there's a big enough audience. The *2000AD* fans would probably squeak with excitement. It has been on our minds.

What's happening with the new version of *Warlock on Firetop Mountain*?

Warlock will use some of the same things as *Appointment with F.E.A.R.*, such as the way it presents the narrative, and we'll be going very heavily map-based. Imagine a tabletop roleplaying game with a map on your parents' table, but in this case the dungeon master is the book. We're trying to evoke that sort of nostalgia, but as a solo game. The map will back up the narrative a lot more. *Fighting Fantasy* legend Jonathan Green will be helping us with rewriting it.

What other franchises would you like to handle?

Oh my gosh, so many. I've spent the last three or four years going through my childhood turning the things I loved into games. If *Appointment with F.E.A.R.* does really well, there are a whole multitude of comic book licences we'd want to sign up. It would be lovely to really make some proper interactive comic books that are really, really good.

For more information about *TIN MAN GAMES* and their forthcoming releases, visit www.tinmangames.com.au



MOVIE REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



DAWN OF THE PLANET OF THE APES

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: MATT REEVES / SCREENPLAY: RICK JAFFA, AMANDA SILVER, MARK BOMBACK / STARRING: ANDY SERKIS, JASON CLARKE, GARY OLDMAN, TOBY KEBBELL, KERI RUSSELL, NICK THURSTON, KIRK ACEVEDO / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

J.J. Abrams, Rian Johnson, Roberto Orci, Michael Bay... take note, this is how you craft an new entry in a long-running franchise while adding something new and interesting to the mix. Dawn of the Planet of the Apes is a master class in how to make an engaging prequel/sequel.

Following on from 2011's Rise of the Planet of the Apes, Dawn picks up "ten winters" later with Caesar (Serkis) and his troupe of super-intelligent apes living happily in San Francisco's Mount Tam State Park. Having not seen any humans for the past "two winters", the ape's idyllic lifestyle is rudely interrupted by a group of humans searching in the woods for something that their struggling community desperately needs; humans who know absolutely nothing of these upright walking, talking apes or their origins, setting the scene for a confrontation between man and ape that we all know the eventual outcome of.

That the path of the series is set in stone doesn't seem to have bothered the

filmmakers, who build a powerful tale of Caesar and Malcolm (Clarke), one of the founders of the human community along with Gary Oldman's Dreyfus, attempting to build trust and friendship between the

two species, and deal with the multiple obstacles in their way. What could have easily become an annoying cavalcade of obvious mix-ups between species becomes something so much more





interesting as predictable sources of conflict are highlighted (the human with an irrational fear of the apes, accidental misunderstandings) and then managed competently by the characters or dismissed in favour of much more complex and interesting dynamics between the characters, both human and ape, although the apes are most definitely to the fore in this film.

Caesar and his close comrades are the core of the film, and are absolutely astounding to the point that they will inevitably be passed over in acting and special effects awards simply because they look so real. Only when the behind the scenes videos of Andy Serkis, Toby Kebbell, and Nick Thurston in their motion capture rigs surface will it be shown how much of the film rests on their acting ability combined with the high tech special effects. The apes' faces are so expressive it's hard not to over-empathise with them and even though they primarily communicate with each other through sign language, only using their voices to emphasise a point or talk to the humans, the sequences with them "talking" amongst themselves are never dull.

Matt Reeves' direction is solid without being overly showy, the desolation of this future world underscored by occasional images of great beauty, such as a San Francisco partly reclaimed by nature, or the apes' forest home. Reeves cleverly uses familiar sounds cues such as an iPad's charging beep or a classic rock song to underscore just how desolate this future has become for humanity.

Despite the best efforts of Caesar and his friends, conflict and strife become inevitable and the action scenes are staged thrillingly, with a siege and battle atop a tower standing out, although there are still plenty of surprises in store. The true horror of war becomes all too real as many of the apes and humans, albeit far too late. A satisfying, if somewhat disheartening climax, seems to set the scene for an even more direct sequel, and based upon the storytelling skill on display here it's a sequel that will be very highly anticipated.

IAIN MCNALLY

EXPECTED 8

ACTUAL 9





HOW TO TRAIN YOUR DRAGON 2

CERT: PG / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DEAN DEBLOIS / STARRING: JAY BARUCHEL, CATE BLANCHETT, GERARD BUTLER, CRAIG FERGUSON, AMERICA FERRERA, JONAH HILL, CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE, T.J. MILLER, KRISTEN WIIG, DJIMON HOUNSOU, KIT HARRINGTON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Animated sequels never inspire overwhelming enthusiasm. Unless you have access to a wizard from Pixar, it's normally a chance to squeeze money from exhausted parents who simply want a peaceful afternoon at the weekend. So why should *How to Train Your Dragon 2* be worth your attention? And why is that little Viking kid from the first movie rocking some adolescent stubble?

How to Train Your Dragon 2 is, for lack of a better term, a proper sequel. This isn't a replay of old comedic beats with a new baby dragon thrown into the mix as a cute sponge, everything here has been developed in a surprisingly organic way. Hiccup (Baruchel) is now 20 years old, he's comfortable with his popularity in the village of Berk, and after the events of the

first film, his mind is yearning to search for whole new islands and dragons over sea.

What they find however is a group of dragon trappers led by Drago Bludvist (Hounsou) who possess an entirely different outlook on the relationship between man and his flying beast. Threatening the livelihood of those on Berk and a mysterious island where Hiccup's mother Valka (Blanchett) resides with her dragons, the Vikings embark on an adventure which quickly forces Hiccup to grow up even faster as the scale of the danger escalates.

It's remarkable how an edge of cynicism never hangs over *How to Train Your Dragon 2*. Everything has beautifully evolved and improved since the original, from the relationship between Hiccup and Astrid to the soaring musical score and the minutely

detailed life-like animation. At times it's a pleasure to observe some of the characters as they cavort in the background, especially Toothless and Valka's dragon-companion Cloudjumper as they go about teasing and trying to win each other's affection, with their facial expressions evoking more than any amount of dialogue ever could.

Even when the thrilling flying action sequences push the series towards borderline fantasy epic territory, the film shines brightest in its quieter and more subdued moments. The reunion between Hiccup's father, Stoick and his longestranged wife is one such heart-melter which carries some surprising emotional heft, showing a refreshing willingness from director and writer Dean DeBlois to tackle difficult themes head-on and not pander to the film's younger audience members.

It's witnessing this series grow with an exciting maturity which really marks *How to Train Your Dragon 2* as a resounding success. It doesn't quite pack the wholly well-rounded climax found in the first, but it's a tantalising and promising leap forward for a series which still stands as one of the summer's most sublime blockbuster rides. With the sequel nailed, we'll just have to hope the final part of the trilogy in 2016 can whisk us away on the knockout flight the franchise deserves.

ADAM STARKEY

EXPECTED +++++++ 8

ACTUAL +++++++ 8





TRANSFORMERS: AGE OF EXTINCTION

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: MICHAEL BAY / SCREENPLAY: EHREN KRUGER / STARRING: MARK WAHLBERG, NICOLA PELTZ, JACK REYNOR, STANLEY TUCCI, KELSEY GRAMMER, TITUS WELLIVER, LI BINGBING / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Michael Bay doesn't just want your money. He wants China's money, Red Bull's money, Victoria's Secret's money and Bud Light's money. The product placement in Age of Extinction is as unoriginal as everything else in the fourth instalment of the Transformers franchise. Seeing those conveniently placed products and adverts shoved right in your eye sockets is nearly as unsatisfying as seeing Optimus Prime ride a Dinobot through Hong Kong.

The thing is, Bay promised he wouldn't be back. After ignoring the critics' panning of the third film and making a mint on Transformers: Dark of the Moon (seventh biggest film of all time), he decided not to leave the franchise and instead to have a fourth go at transforming our childhood memories into bloated blockbuster Bayhem. Anyone hoping that the infamous director has toned any of his excesses down in Age of Extinction should forget about seeing this manic but infuriating reboot/sequel.

Set three years after the events of the previous film, Age of Extinction aims for a fresh start by ditching Shia LaBeouf, Megan Fox and that other model from the third film. Gone too are the wacky Witwicky parents and instead, now the main character is a parent himself. Cade Yeager (Wahlberg) is a failing inventor with a barn full of busted-up robot junk and a (surprise, surprise) smoking-hot teen daughter (Peltz). While scouting out an old cinema, Cade finds an old truck which, lo and behold, turns out to be a very badly damaged Optimus Prime.

Since the decimation of Chicago three years earlier, the Transformers have become public enemy number one and even the Autobots have been hunted down and killed by a shady CIA black ops unit run by Harold Attinger (Grammer). Meanwhile, corporate bigwig Joshua (Stanley Tucci) has been building his own Transformers that he thinks will form an army to defend America from all its future enemies.

Despite all the talk of Transformer terrorists and defending freedom, Age of Extinction has not a single subtle subtextual bone in its mighty impressive body. This is the equivalent of a director of overstuffed spectacle getting his balls out and swinging them around so hard that he knocks over all the furniture. Such is the audacity of Bay, that in an early scene he has one character bemoan endless remakes and sequels of modern cinema. How ironic... not.

This is the kind of film where the villain is introduced in a shadowy boardroom, every moment on a Texas farm is filmed at that gorgeous Malickian magic hour and every shot of the bad guys is taken from a ludicrously low angle that makes them loom over the camera. It looks superb, but beneath it all is a shallow, borderline-offensive film that is as repetitive as it is dumb.

The daddy-daughter dynamic is tired before it even gets going. Bay sticks the camera down Peltz's top and then has Wahlberg chastise the size of her shorts. The director ogles every woman's legs and has every exchange between Cade and Tessa be a concern over boys and dating. The only guy Wahlberg's character should really be worried about being near his teen daughter is the 49-year-old Michael Bay. At least he holds back from draping her over any vehicles like Megan Fox put up with through two films. The dynamic between father and daughter provides few laughs and even less opportunity for character development.

Not that character development is what audiences are flocking to a Transformers film for. The new Autobots are a forgettable bunch except Hound who at least isn't a crass racial stereotype, unlike some others. Cade is an unexceptional individual, made mildly amusing by the likeable Wahlberg. Tessa is the pretty Barbie doll to be thrown around along with the rest of Bay's toys and Jack Reynor as Tessa's boyfriend Shane

gets little to do except drive fast and be the butt of Wahlberg's tiresome Irish jokes. Only Stanley Tucci gets to stand out as a character who is aware of the ridiculousness of the film he is in, and even has a hysterical breakdown at the insanity of it all.

As one character exclaims, it really is both 'awesome and insane'. While it's all too easy to pick apart its plot, poke fun at its distracting product placement and cringe at its sexist machismo, Age of Extinction does have some occasionally outstanding action. However, what is becoming increasingly and frustratingly clear as the franchise (and Bay's career) continues, is that when it comes to visual effects there is definitely such a thing as having too much of a good thing. While the transformations and city destruction are undoubtedly spectacular, what is more impressive are the action scenes featuring good old-fashioned cars and people. The best moments offer beautiful cars in stunning landscapes, and car chases that for the most part feel crushingly convincing. Though Bay appears forced to shoehorn China into the plot to justify financial backing, the buildings of Hong Kong make for an exciting rooftop chase between Wahlberg and one CIA bad guy.

There's no denying that Bay has made some good, fun action comedies. However, he's made the Transformers franchise over-complicated, from the actual robots, to the swollen stories full of characters you will struggle to remember, to the excessive city-trashing set-pieces. He may have Optimus Prime ride into Hong Kong on a Dinobot but by that time, you're likely to be past caring anymore. It's time for Bay to go back to what he does best: Bad Boys 3 anyone?

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED  6

ACTUAL  4

REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME
VIDEO RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



HAUNTER

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: VINCENZO NATALI / SCREENPLAY: MATTHEW BRIAN KING / STARRING: ABIGAIL BRESLIN, STEPHEN MC'HATTIE, PETER OUTERBRIDGE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

It's probably a reasonable assumption to say that director Vincenzo Natali doesn't suffer from claustrophobia. His impressive 1997 debut feature *Cube* was set primarily within a maze of deadly, identical rooms. Prior to that he directed the short film *Elevated*, which was set entirely in, well, an elevator.

For his fifth feature film, the director has returned to the single location format that made his name, albeit a somewhat larger one. This time the setting is a suburban family home, which the director has used as the location for an intricate, largely original ghost story.

Telling a story from the perspective of a ghost is nothing new. Both *The Sixth Sense* and *The Others* used this concept to become smash hits. Unlike those movies, though, *Haunter* has the lead character realise her supernatural status early on, and instead tells an entirely different story.

It starts off with every teenager's worst nightmare. It's 1985 and 15-year-old Lisa Johnson (Breslin) is trapped in a perpetual, boring day. It's the day before her 16th birthday and she's stuck in the house due to the heavy fog outside. Her dad's fixing the car, her brother's playing Pac-Man, her mum's making macaroni cheese and nagging her to help with the laundry. The highlight of the day will be watching *Murder, She Wrote*. And the next day it's still the day

before her 16th birthday...

It's a neat concept. What teenager hasn't felt like time is standing still when they're stuck with their family? Here it's the literal truth. Every day is the same for Lisa. Soon however, her repetitive existence takes a turn when she begins to investigate ghostly goings on in the house. Little changes creep into the routine. Her dad starts acting in an unusual manner, the supernatural occurrences become more and more frequent, and then there's a locked door in the basement which holds a strange fascination for her.

Rather than the movie overplaying its supernatural Groundhog Day concept, Lisa soon realises that both her and her family are dead. To make matters worse, a mysterious visitor (Mc'Hattie) shows up and warns her off investigating any further, advising that "there are some things worse than death."

Naturally, she ignores him and makes contact with the house's present day occupant, her 21st century counterpart, Olivia. It soon becomes apparent that Olivia and her family are facing a similar fate to Lisa's, and that the key to saving them is discovering what happened to her own family.

As with the director's previous movie, *Splice*, the intriguing concept doesn't quite pay off. Not overdoing

the Groundhog Day thing works ultimately as both a strength and a weakness. Veering away from this early on saves the film from getting repetitive. However, the murder mystery that replaces it is more conventional, and therefore, ultimately, less interesting.

That said, there's much to enjoy here. Abigail Breslin, following impressive turns in *Zombieland* and her Oscar-nominated performance in *Little Miss Sunshine*, gives another (no pun intended) spirited performance. With her underdeveloped family barely getting a look in, it's down to her to carry the film in her largest role to date. Mc'Hattie also impresses, as a killer whose reach stretches out from beyond the grave. There are some good shocks and creepy moments aplenty, with some impressive ghosts, and probably the most sinister boiler room since Freddy Krueger hung up his razor gloves. Natali constructs an intricate labyrinth of a plot for his characters (the Pac-Man metaphor, with ghosts floating around a maze, is particularly apt). And there are some other beautiful little touches too, such as when Lisa enters Olivia's time and we see her utterly baffled by the future. Olivia's iPad is science fiction to a girl from the '80s.

When *Haunter* works it's an effective, creepy horror. Ultimately, it doesn't quite add up to the sum of its parts, but it's an entertaining film from one of the genre's more original filmmakers.

Extras: None

IAIN ROBERTSON





THE PIT

DVD + VOD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: CHAD CRAWFORD
KINKLE / STARRING: SEAN BRIDGERS, LAUREN ASHLEY CARTER, LARRY
FESSENDER, SEAN YOUNG, DANIEL MANCHE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Originally titled *Jug Face*, this intriguing feature debut from writer/director Kinkle has an assured style, and a deep mythology which will keep one thinking long after the credits roll.

An isolated backwoods community is in jeopardy when young Ada (Carter) discovers Dawai (a brilliantly understated Bridgers), a local potter who has fashioned a jug bearing her face.

This means she is next to be sacrificed to 'the Pit': a hole in the ground worshipped, feared and revered as if it were a God. She hides the jug, but things get worse as she becomes pregnant – the father being her brother, Jessaby (Manche), something frowned upon even in this hick society. As the Pit has not been satisfied by the chosen sacrifice, it begins

taking various locals, who in turn become spirits roaming the forest as 'the shunned'.

Right from the simple but evocative animation which accompanies the opening credits, we become immersed in the film's mythology and ideology. The community has a language of its own, part hick-speak, part Olde English, and seems from another time; though this is very much a contemporary tale. Both Carter and Bridgers played key roles in executive producer Lucky McKee's *The Woman*, and in a way *The Pit* shares a similar feel: something off-kilter, infused with warped family values and overbearing parental influence. The matriarch here, played gloriously by Young, is certainly no shrinking violet, vigorously inspecting Ada for both evidence of intercourse and menstruation ("she is dripping"). It is worth noting this is not a mere satire on religion, but it does raise questions about blindly following a belief, regardless of consequence – Ada's resistance to her sacrifice coming, not from a lack of faith, but rather a wish to live. We are in no doubt that the Pit is a real entity, but

wisely Kinkle keeps whatever is in there out of sight, as when special effects do come in to play (as with the shunned) they betray the film's low budget. It is a pensive film that works well; eerily atmospheric, impressively acted, and with an effective score, a film which is as organic as the forest. Don't miss it.

Extras: None

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++ 9



SCAR TISSUE

DVD + VOD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: SCOTT MICHELL
STARRING: DANNY HORN, CHARITY WAKEFIELD, KENNETH COLLEY
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 4TH

Scar Tissue is the second outing for filmmaker Scott Michell after 1996's so-so *The Innocent Sleep*. Directed from his own script, *Scar Tissue* is cut from the same cloth as *Alex Chandon's Cradle of Fear*: underfunded, overacted and largely forgettable. That's not to say *Scar Tissue* isn't without its merits, but its flaws overwhelm an otherwise interesting idea.

The film joins a roster of low-budget British crime chillers, though its influences, which

it wears on its sleeves, are from further afield, with nods to *Saw* and *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* in particular. *Scar Tissue* does seem to live in its own world, as no specific location is given, and even the D.I. is touting a pistol.

The plot is rather cunning, seeming to offer a murder in the style of Edward Jansen, a child-killer who bears an uncanny resemblance to League of Gentlemen's campy Herr Lipp. It then appears to unfold

into a killer that can't be killed story, joining slasher stalwarts and marketing magnets Freddy, Jason, Michael Myers et al. But by the time the veil is lifted, it's genuinely an unexpected and welcomed surprise.

The acting is largely unconvincing, though Sean Dingwell (Doctor Who, *Dragon Age: Origins*) as Snowden decked out like *The X-Files'* Deep Throat is entertaining. Pathologist Mo, played by Imogen Bain, in a role begging to be filled by Dawn French, is another example of a badly written straw feminist and stereotypical lesbian. Charity Wakefield sports a Ramona Flowers hairstyle as Sam. While Wakefield doesn't offer a particularly subtle performance, the best scenes are the ones when she's on-screen, usually opposite the largely unsympathetic, seemingly good guy Luke.

At times *Scar Tissue* is desperate to appear noir, with Snowden in long black trench coat smoking a cigarette in the shadows, but ends up being a parody of a police procedural. Mark Cameron, who's played coppers in every other British

crime show, is turned up to 11 as D.I. Hackman, spouting misogynistic and homophobic sound-bites you wouldn't want your nan to hear.

The film spends far too long in the strip-cum-fetish club (three times to be precise), giving the viewer an eyeful of unnecessary close-ups and lingering shots. Worse still, the brutal violence is all directed against women, while the few blokes who do bite the dust get to keep all their clothes on, and die with some dignity.

But the really disappointing thing about *Scar Tissue* is the fact that during its big reveal it's really quite gripping and interesting; for seven minutes at least. There was a lot of potential in the plot and it's a real shame that this isn't another home-grown success story of a thriller like *Shane Meadows'* 2004 *Dead Man's Shoes*. If it's a dark and brooding British crime drama you want, stick with the Beeb or ITV.

Extras: None

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

+++++ 5



RETURN TO NUKE 'EM HIGH VOLUME 1

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: LLOYD KAUFMAN / SCREENPLAY: TRAVIS CAMPBELL, DEREK PRESSLER, LLOYD KAUFMAN / STARRING: ASTA PAREDES, CATHERINE CORCORAN, ZAC AMICO, VITO TRIGO, LEMMY, STAN LEE, KEVIN THE DUCK / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Troma has always produced its features with its tongue rammed firmly in its cheek and one hand rammed firmly down its pants. Return to Nuke 'Em High Volume 1 does what it says on the tin; it's a return to the deeply goofy movies that made Troma a household name in the more disreputable sort of home back in the '80s and '90s.

The plot involves an evil

corporation called Tromorganic Foodstuffs Conglomerate who have begun to peddle it's 100% not polluted organic glowing green guacamole-filled tacos to the local schools as they've been banned from selling their perfectly safe food anywhere else. Of course the main consumer of these foodstuffs is Tromaville High School, an educational establishment

that proudly announces that its longest running record between high school shootings is three days. Things kick off when the high school genius has an allergic reaction to the food that causes his head to explode in a horrific and messy way. Matters get even worse when the school's own glee club transform into post-apocalyptic punk rock mutants, because why not? They still sing, unfortunately, and their reign of terror begins in earnest.

To say that this is a dumb movie with dumb jokes is an understatement of epic proportions. This is a feature that does foreshadowing by having the shadow of the number four appear on the wall. You have to be very clever to be this dumb, and really dumb to think that this sort of thing is clever. That said, there is plenty of sharp (though unsubtle) social commentary hidden amongst all the boobs, bottoms and blood.

Plenty of light swipes at teenage movies and TV series are made throughout, though it's hard to call this a parody; it's too daft to be that focused.

It's safe to say that most of the cast are out-acted by the duck. The only performance that comes close is Lemmy from Motörhead's cameo as the President of the United States.

Taken in the spirit that it's intended, Return to Nuke 'Em High Volume 1 is a deeply stupid piece of fun, filled with penis monsters, gore, off-colour humour and nudity, and a firm addition to the Nuke 'Em High franchise.

Extras: None

ED FORTUNE



VIDEO NASTIES: THE DEFINITIVE GUIDE PART 2 - DRACONIAN DAYS

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: JAKE WEST / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Jake West has followed up his excellent documentary, Video Nasties: Moral Panic, Censorship & Videotape (2011), with a juicy sequel focused on the repercussions of the Video Recordings Act 1984 and the continued demonisation of horror movies by the British press, ignorant MPs and clueless Johnny Law. Unlike some of the participants, often featured in archived clips,

the documentary is critical but open to the opinions of both sides of the argument. It leaves those spouting the most outrageous and ill-informed nonsense to hang themselves.

The film's remit is to investigate how the classification process became an even more draconian form of movie censorship than known previously. The BBFC, it can be argued, made

the rules up as they went along. How do you define and measure potential harm, exactly? The genius of the BBFC's argument in the post-video nasties era was based on a premise of home invasion. Horror titles could be accessible to kids and their minds warped forever, thus precipitating the collapse of British society and moral standards. Yep, it really must have sucked being a horror fan in the 1980s and 1990s.

Given the shrill and cynical manner in which the news media reported all things 'video nasty', you'd be mistaken in believing watching a horror movie turned you into a depraved criminal. It's a pretty big and presumptuous call to suggest the masses cannot tell apart fantasy from reality. The BBFC's policies had an unintended result, however: the formation of an enterprising, rebellious subculture, where collectors traded uncut horror movies through fanzines and at various organised events. They stuck it to the Man!

Class prejudice has always been a mainstay of British film censorship. In

the early days, politics and religion were the big no-no. As the times changed, snooty attitudes remained the same. According to the BBFC, sex and violence on the big screen would lead us down the road to social chaos. But they ventured even further into the realms of generalised lunacy. Who knew how the uneducated might react if they watched a Ninja Turtle use a string of sausages as a martial arts weapon?! The BBFC quantify it as 'imitative techniques'. Yes, even a movie that featured talking ninja turtles was trimmed for its UK release.

Watching Video Nasties: Draconian Days, it's hard not to feel angry and depressed about what has happened in this country over the past thirty years. Movies do not define social ills, they reflect them. Can the BBFC and those in power not tell the difference?

Extras: As above

MARTYN CONTERIO





PATRICK: EVIL AWAKENS

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: MARK HARTLEY / SCREENPLAY: JUSTIN KING / STARRING: SHARNI VINSON, CHARLES DANCE, RACHEL GRIFFITHS, JACKSON GALLAGHER, PETA SERGEANT / RELEASE DATE: AUG 11TH

A remake of the 1970s horror *Patrick*, *Patrick: Evil Awakens* brings the story to the present day while retaining much of the same plot and themes.

Young nurse Kathy Jaquard (Vinson) begins working at a mysterious remote care facility for comatose patients under the stone-faced observation of Matron Cassidy (Griffiths) and the obsessive Dr Roget (Dance). She soon learns of the doctor's pet project, a young man named Patrick (Gallagher) whose

physical form remains perfect despite his condition. It soon becomes apparent to Kathy that Patrick may be more aware than anyone realised, as well as being in possession of hidden abilities.

Produced as part of the Ozploitation movement of the '70s and '80s that gave us titles like *Mad Max*, *Long Weekend*, *Turkey Shoot* and *The Cars That Ate Paris*, like many once-shocking films the original *Patrick* has lost much of its impact, so producing a remake

in this case is not quite as redundant as it usually is.

Rising horror star Vinson (Bait, *You're Next*) is as engaging as ever, portraying equal parts inexperience and determination. She can certainly scream with the best of them, although Kathy's vulnerability is at times belied by Vinson's stunt training, making her appear far more agile and physically durable than she should be. Kathy's gradual realisation of what's going on from being a victim, *Patrick* is just as thoughtless and selfish as everyone else she encounters forms the backbone of the story, along with her discovery of the true extent of his psychokinetic powers.

Dance has practically made a career of playing characters defined by an aloof condescension stemming from believing everyone else to be his intellectual inferior. Roget is no exception, his disregard for anyone else's opinions or emotions mark him as just as potentially villainous as Patrick himself. Providing occasional relief from the Gothic gloom of the setting is Peta Sergeant (Iron Sky's cleavage-sporting

PR queen Vivian Wagner) as Nurse Williams, a vibrant dynamo of a woman, who since Kathy is the protagonist and everyone else is not particularly likeable, remains the one character you genuinely fear for.

Less a remake in the true sense, this is more of an update of the original film. Patrick's communication via mentally manipulating a typewriter is changed to a computer screen, conveniently set to a 72pt font so we can actually read what's on it without extreme close-ups, while the importance of the ever-presence of electricity is signified by a lot more than the incessant buzzing of a neon sign. A few choice lines from the original also manage to find their way into the script; a roomful of comatose patients chanting "Patrick wants his handjob" is particularly effective.

A decent remake of a lesser-known film, *Patrick: Evil Awakens* keeps the spirit of the original alive while managing to forge its own distinctive identity.

Extras: None

ANDREW MARSHALL



VISITORS

DVD + BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GOOFREY REGGIO / STARRING: SOME PEOPLE, AN APE / RELEASE DATE: JULY 21ST

We're betting that Godfrey Reggio and Philip Glass's previous cinematic works, *The Oatsi Trilogy* (comprising the films *Koyaanisqatsi*, *Powaqatsi* and *Naqoyqatsi*), won't be featuring too prominently on many people's DVD shelves, jostling for position with the *Back to the Future* trilogy and *The Inbetweeners Movie*. To call Reggio's work an acquired taste is to entirely fail to convey exactly what's in store here; Reggio sets out to explore the

nature and impermanence of the human condition and our relationship with our technology, our world and our environment. This he does in *Visitors* in some eighty minutes (just 74 separate shots) of black-and-white, occasionally moving images of random faces – men, women, children, the elderly – alongside abstract views of buildings, towers of rubbish, extraordinary landscapes and the surface of the moon. Oh, and a big gorilla which stares lugubriously out from the screen now and again...

Even compared to Reggio's previous works, there's apparently nothing going on here – there's absolutely no narrative – but that seems to be the point. The stark, vivid imagery demands that the viewer does all the work and take away from the movie whatever individual interpretation he or she may be minded to ascribe to the film. But that alone raises some problems and inevitable cries of 'pretentious twaddle' and, in some respects, it's a tough charge to resist. For those not accustomed to watching this kind of movie (and this reviewer is not ashamed to admit that this is an entirely new experience for him), *Visitors* is as much of a shock as it is a challenge and, as the array of smiling, laughing faces, followed by a flock of birds in flight, a derelict amusement park, an unfamiliar landscape all roll by, it's almost impossible to resist the feeling that this is eighty minutes of your life you're just not going to get back again. Yet despite it all, there's something weirdly hypnotic about *Visitors*, underpinned as it is by Glass's compelling and atmospheric ambient score.

The photography, pin-sharp in

monochrome, is bold, striking and vibrant and is itself enough to keep you watching when you can't help thinking your time might be better spent de-fleeing the cat or cleaning out the fridge.

Visitors is an interesting experience but undoubtedly one best appreciated by the arty crowd it's aimed at rather than simple souls who just want to watch a decent movie with a beginning, middle and end. *Visitors* has none of these; it's just there...

Extras: Interviews / Behind-the-scenes / Trailer

PAUL MOUNT





AFTER THE DARK

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JOHN HUDDLES / STARRING: JAMES D'ARCY, SOPHIE LOWE, DARYL SABARA, FREDDIE STROMA / RELEASE DATE: JULY 21ST

John Huddles' *After the Dark* may sell itself like a sci-fi tinged survival thriller, but really, it's nothing more than speculation and role-playing, like a drawn-out drama exercise. Like Hot Chocolate's ubiquitous song, it starts with a kiss. In fact, the keen, stylish plot is bookended by a mawkish love story.

The hypothetical thought experiment, which is an end of term treat from megalomaniacal Mr Zimit

(D'Arcy) to his philosophy students, is set exclusively in a classroom and, in that regard, has more in common with *Dead Poets Society* than 2011's *The Divide*.

The first iteration of the thought experiment is interesting enough, the second is pushing it, but the heavy-handed liberal third incarnation is simply masturbation. Repetition in movies is often hugely effective (look at this year's *Edge of*

Tomorrow) but having three goes at the same idea is better explored in the anarchic German flick *Run Lola Run*.

The apparently gifted students are only able to recite the most basic pop-philosophy which begs the question whether Huddles' himself was a philosophy student. It's doubtful, and his Google research shines through in his script.

The visual representation of philosophy conundrums is like taking a peek into Sherlock's mind palace. Indeed, D'Arcy appears to have modelled his performance on Benedict Cumberbatch. Interestingly enough, D'Arcy has played Holmes, in the lukewarm 2002 TV movie *Sherlock*.

Some of the performances leave a lot to be desired, Bonnie Wright, better known as Ginny Weasley in the Harry Potter franchise, doesn't stretch herself especially far, though Daryl Sabara (all grown up after playing *Juni in Spy Kids*) is fun as Chips. But it's D'Arcy who stands out, Cumberbatch aside.

The Jakarta setting is an especially nice touch, and the establishing shots are

striking, but even after genre successes like *District 9*, South Africa remains largely, and sadly, ignored.

The film ultimately suffers from not being nearly as smart as it thinks it is and being too smart for its own good. It does raise one question that has been debated over many pints and coffees in student digs and on the tube: how would you survive if nuclear bombs fell?

Instead of presenting an interesting deconstruction of philosophy, getting to the heart of the subject, exploring class, intellect, gender, sexuality etc. it instead opts to be an underwhelming love story.

After the Dark is another interesting idea undermined by an overtly sentimental ending. There is something there, a pervasive tenseness that begs a second viewing, but the film is little more than convoluted romance.

Extras: None

DOMINIC CUTHBERT



MISCHIEF NIGHT

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: RICHARD SCHENKMAN STARRING: IAN BAMBERG, NOELL COET, ADAM C. EDWARDS / RELEASE DATE: JULY 28TH

'Mischief Night' apparently being a holiday in which children engage in petty vandalism and general naughtiness, annoying their neighbours by egging windows and throwing toilet paper at trees. And, in the case of *Mischief Night*, breaking into a blind girl's (Coet) home and harassing her with a hatchet, rain mac and mask. The mask is a little redundant though.

Because, you know, she's blind.

There are Daredevil jokes abounding as Emily (not convincingly) sidesteps broken glass, detects her boyfriend's change in hair colour and fights off a crazed psychopath, all while looking oddly like iCarly. Not that I know what iCarly looks like. It's not a bad concept for a horror film or thriller – think *Blind Terror* crossed

with *You're Next* – but *Mischief Night* regularly fails to live up to its promise.

Pedestrian in terms of atmosphere, direction and action, it's too slow, not scary enough and lacking in tension. That's a shame, since its villain looks effective, decked out in an ugly Halloween mask and bright yellow rain mac. We'd like to say that the yellow mac is another Daredevil reference, but that would probably be giving the filmmakers too much credit. Set almost entirely in Emily's home, *Mischief Night* invites unfortunate comparisons to *Halloween* and – as the film plays in one scene – *Night*

of the Living Dead, neither of which it could ever hope to hold a candle to.

Like kids egging your window or writing on your microwave door with tomato ketchup (a thing, apparently), *Mischief Night* is a minor irritant. Sure, it's annoying and stupid, but it's not really worth getting worked up about. Like this film, *Mischief Night* is just a poor man's *Halloween*.

Extras: None

JOEL HARLEY





MIRAGE MEN

DVD / CERT: E / DIRECTOR: JOHN LUNDBERG, ROLAND DENNING, KYPROS KYPRIANOU / SCREENPLAY: MARK PILKINGTON / STARRING: RICK DOTY, GREG BISHOP / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Most conspiracy theories surrounding extraterrestrials or unidentified flying objects are intent on convincing you that they exist. This one does exactly the opposite. Kind of.

During a time in America's history when paranoia was at its height and espionage was an ever-increasing issue for the US government, it would

seem that those behind the curtain hatched an ingenious plan: pretend all of their secret government research was of alien origin. To do this, they would need the assistance of *Mirage Men*, agents who would infiltrate the UFO-believing community, spreading disinformation and ultimately discrediting any and all

sightings of otherwise classified projects. After all, who would believe that alien ships kept crashing in the desert or that aliens were mutilating cattle? Nobody, and that's just what they wanted.

Front and centre of this unique conspiracy theory is Richard Doty, a former Special Agent who, in his day, was sent in to tackle tricky cases where ordinary citizens had stumbled across matters of national security and had sought to bring them to public attention. Swooping in like some kind of Deep Throat 'yes man', he would spoon-feed 'alien intel' to the point where the last thing on their minds would be a more terrestrial explanation.

To that end, early American tests for drones and stealth aircraft were sold as UFOs and alien visitations, while cattle mutilations (allegedly a US initiative to gauge radioactive fallout effects after an underground nuclear 'fracking' incident) were also passed off as an intervention by little green men.

If all is to be believed (and there's no definitive proof to say that this story is any more

genuine than the stories they allegedly faked), it was a genius initiative. As this mind-opening documentary reveals, it had its drawbacks though as UFO enthusiasts are understandably up in arms about it and some of Doty's victims suffered horrendous mental issues as a result.

As UFO conspiracy films go, this is a breath of fresh air and an insight into both the world of those who seek the truth about aliens and (perhaps more interestingly) the ways in which the government potentially manipulates its populace. And whether you believe the lie, or the lie testing the lie, you won't be able to ignore the logic behind *Mirage Men*'s message. "There were about nine crashes in the 1940s," UFO researcher Peter Gersten explains, perhaps summing it up best. "And that would suggest to me that they were testing something that was crashing."

Extras: 22 short films / Booklet

GRANT KEMPSTER



FOR ELISA

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JUANITA FERNANDEZ / STARRING: ANA TURPIN, ONA CASAMIQUELA, LUISA GRAVASA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Named after the Beethoven composition *Für Elise*, *Para Elisa* is a Spanish horror film with a simple enough premise. Ona Casamiquela is Ana, a fine arts student (in a role that you could imagine starring a younger Jennifer Connolly) who takes a babysitting job that quickly turns sinister. While the sum of its parts are innocuous and trite, together it makes for a surprisingly compelling film.

Dolls are innately creepy and a staple of the horror genre, from Dolly Dearest, to Child's Play and Jigsaw's tricycle-riding mascot in the Saw series, but they've lost a lot of cultural prevalence and potency as a trope. The unsettling elements of *Para Elisa* aren't related to the idea of dolls, per se, but a fear of adolescence, and Elisa's dependence on her mother is

rather unnerving.

Ana Turpin is chilling as the titular Elisa, reminiscent of Kathy Bates in *Misery*, but it's her mother Diamantina, played by Luisa Gravasa, who steals the film, decked out like a demented Maude from *Hal Ashby's* cult classic.

There's some pretty spooky stuff here too, made spookier off camera, relying only on the sound. Just because you can show something doesn't mean you should; cinema, at its best, functions on trickery and illusion.

At only 75 minutes long, *Para Elisa* manages to create tense and claustrophobic interactions between Elisa and Ana alongside the sleuth element of Ana's off-again-on-again boyfriend Alex (Jesus Caba) attempting to find her.

Whether or not *Para Elisa* is supposed to be a comment on the frivolous and fickle fashion industry or the preservation of youth is unclear. In many ways the narrative would have worked very well as a short story, intertwining Gothic aspects with adolescence as in *Angela Carter's The Bloody Chamber*.

The most exciting and

transgressive horror cinema is coming out of Europe, and Spain, in particular, has really been delivering the goods over the last twenty years or so: *The Devil's Backbone*, *The Orphanage* and *Tesis* are all great examples. While *Para Elisa* doesn't quite step up to the plate, it's a notch above a lot of twaddle getting churned out.

Extras: None

DOMINIC CUTHBERT





PORKY'S (1982)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: BOB CLARK / STARRING: DAN MONAHAN, MARK HERRIER, KAKI HUNTER, KIM CATTRALL, WYATT KNIGHT, NANCY PARSONS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With a massive cult following, Bob (Black Christmas) Clark's Porky's films defined a certain era of American filmmaking. By no means was it the first, but almost definitely the best remembered of the fifties-based college sex comedies, which seemed to flourish after the success of films such as George Lucas' American Graffiti (1973) and John Landis' National Lampoon's Animal House (1978). Porky's added the extra elements that audiences wanted: more sex and unabashed nudity.

The story follows a group

of college kids pulling the usual pranks and desperately trying to bed anything that moves; particularly Pee Wee (Monahan), who will do anything to lose his virginity. Cue a trip to the titular out-of-state redneck bar, run by the impossibly huge and corrupt Porky (Chuck Mitchell). Tricked and humiliated, the teens decide they must get revenge at all costs. Among this thin 'plot' is essential a series of vignettes of various sexual high jinks - most of which would put the perpetrator in court if tried today - while a sub-plot involving

bullying, parental abuse, and anti-Semitism doesn't lower the mood too much.

At times very funny, its success lies in the vulgar, puerile, and offensive nature of the subject. It's completely un-PC and as mentioned, the behaviour of the gang wouldn't be tolerated these days; however, sexual curiosity is a very natural thing (although we didn't all have peepholes in the girls' shower room) and the females are just as compliant in the antics. Motel Hell star Parsons is formidable as the Nazi-like gym teacher Balbricker, who has a personal vendetta to catch the boys up to no good and features in the most mirthful scenes, to great effect.

While other recent films out-do the outrageousness of the material, Porky's still stands proud as an entertaining example of the genre. The main cast are relative newcomers, although Cattrall has gone on to bigger things, notably Big Trouble in Little China (1986) and The Sex and the City series.

As is the case with Arrow's cult releases, they have packed the disc with some great supplementary features. As well as an entertaining commentary

from Clark, there's a short retrospective with the late director, which is particularly appealing for those who don't bother with chat tracks. Another provides a broader look at the American teen sex comedy genre of the early eighties, and touches on its resurgence with the American Pie films. Image wise, the presentation is as would be expected for a relatively low-budget film, while not popping from the screen, there's a definite improvement on the colours and detail, while retaining the film grain and ambience of original viewings; although maybe not sharp enough to make out individual hairs. Now, has anyone seen Mike Hunt?

Extras: Audio commentary / Porky's Through the Peephole - Bob Clark looks back at his box-office sensation / Skin Classic! - Mr Skin celebrates Porky's and the heyday of the '80s teen sex comedy / Porky's trailer reel / illustrated booklet.

MARTIN UNSWORTH



BLOODY BIRTHDAY (1981)

BD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: ED HUNT / SCREENPLAY: ED HUNT, BARRY PEARSON / STARRING: LORI LETHIN, JULIE BROWN, ELIZABETH HOY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Bloody Birthday takes the sporadically trendy "killer kid" subgenre and crosses it with the slasher movie, which was then in its early '80s heyday, when any new angle seemed worth a punt. Not that the kids in question stalk their victims with anything as rudimentary as knives - no, their weapons of choice are guns, baseball bats and, er, skipping ropes. Still, you get the picture.

The three killer kids in question are born during a solar eclipse, which messes up their astrological charts and causes them to become little psychos. On the verge of their tenth birthday, they go on a murder spree, gunning down their teacher and tidyng up the crime scene like pros (although wouldn't you be able to tell from the trajectory of the bullet that the shooter was only four feet

tall?). Sweet little Timmy (K.C. Martel) is an unwitting witness to one of the crimes and becomes their next target, but his elder sister Joyce (Lethin) begins to sense that something is not quite right with his beady-eyed playmates.

It's all enjoyably cheesy but not too silly, thanks in great measure to writer/director Ed Hunt's confidently low-key, commonsensical handling of the story. There's a slow, deliberate build to the acts of violence (including one very nifty murder involving a bow and arrow and a peephole) which gives them weight. And those are some scary kids, especially their twinkly, blonde, butter-wouldn't-melt ringleader, Debbie - an adorably creepy performance from young Elizabeth Hoy that should have turned her into a child star. If ET had landed in this lot's back yard, they would have sent him home in pieces.

This Blu-ray offers a pretty decent HD transfer - there's some grain in the close-ups but the wide shots are crisp and nicely atmospheric. It comes with a 9-minute

interview with Lori Lethin, who tells a few funny anecdotes about the cast and reveals that there was no child safety regs on the three week shoot in Pasadena. There's also a Brief History of the Slasher Movies, which offers a sprightly romp through the subgenre all the way from Psycho to the remakes of the mid-Noughties. A decent little '80s horror nicely presented.

Extras: Don't Eat That Cake / A Brief History of the Slasher Movies / Trailers

JULIAN WHITE





CAPTAIN CLEGG (1962)

DVD + BD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: PETER GRAHAM SCOTT / SCREENPLAY: ANTHONY HINDS / STARRING: PETER CUSHING, YVONNE ROMAIN, PATRICK ALLEN, OLIVER REED / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

While not as revered as their horror output, there was some interesting and exciting romps among Hammer's action films. Captain Clegg was one such film, and can now be enjoyed in all its glory after years of obscurity, thanks to this newly restored edition.

1792, and in the area of Dymchurch on the Romney Marshes, overlooking the seas to France, smugglers bring their bounty of wine and brandy to out-wit the hefty taxation laws. Rather like nipping over to

Dover on the weekend ferries, then. There is something more to fear in this area as stories spread of the Marsh Phantoms, who strike fear into those unfortunate enough to see them. Dymchurch is also the last resting place of the notorious pirate Captain Clegg, whose grave is in the village churchyard. Their preacher, Reverend Dr Blyss (Cushing) is a noble, generous, and well-liked man, and is shocked when the men of the Royal Crown march into town amid reports

of smuggling. Led by Captain Collier (Allen, who voiced many UKTV adverts), they set about searching the local tavern ran by Mr Rash (Martin Benson) and the workshop of the ever busy coffin maker, Jeremiah Mipps (the ever-reliable Michael Ripper, in perhaps his biggest role for Hammer). They fail to find any trace of illicit booze, despite using their prototype sniffer dog: the Mutalito (Milton Reid, a distinctive character actor who would appear in several horror films before resorting to sex comedies), a character seen left to die by Clegg in the pre-credits sequence. It seems Collier and his men rescued him as they were on Clegg's trail, and used him as a way of finding hidden wine since then. After coming up empty on the search, Mutalito loses control when he comes face to face with the genial Blyss, attempting to kill him.

Although not technically a horror film, it's a lot of fun, and the acting is first class all round. Oliver Reed had yet to turn into the caricature of his later life and is an imposing presence, and the subplot involving his romantic entanglement with the innkeeper's ward, Imogene

(Romain) doesn't slow the action down. Cushing is at his best as the Vicar hiding a secret, which most will have seen coming a mile off. The film is a brilliant, rip-roaring adventure, bolstered by some spooky and atmospheric moments involving the phantoms on the marsh and the creepy scarecrow and certainly better than the Disney version (Dr. Syn alias the Scarecrow, 1963).

This new HD transfer is stunning. The picture practically jumps from the screen, bursting with colour and detail, although it does highlight some focus issues when the camera zooms in for close-ups.

For supplementary material, we have an informative, albeit a little dry, 30-minute documentary on the making of the film and a short look at the various horse-drawn carriages used over the years by Hammer. Not particularly earth shattering extras, but they are definitely worth a look.

Extras: As above

MARTIN UNSWORTH



THE BATTERY

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JEREMY GARDNER / STARRING: JEREMY GARDNER, ADAM CRONHEIM, NIELS BOLLE / RELEASE DATE: JULY 21ST

Shot for \$6000 over 15 days, Jeremy Gardner's *The Battery* is to the zombie sub-genre what Gareth Edwards' *Monsters* is to alien invasion. Both films were dismissed by some as boring, but to say that is to miss the point entirely. *The Battery* is a study of character and country that happens to be set amidst an undead epidemic.

Given its budget and guerrilla-style approach, it's little surprise that *The Battery* is informed more by indie cinema than straight-up horror. While there are certainly nods to the nasty, including zombie maestro George A. Romero's early anarchic works, it's more Jim

Jarmusch than Lucio Fulci.

The CD Walkman not only provides comfort for Mickey (Cronheim), but also for the audience – after all the MP3 doesn't exist physically and after a zombie outbreak there'd have to be a return to more basic technologies. The eponymous battery doesn't simply refer to the two former baseball players (completed by Gardner's grizzled Ben), but rather a symbol of humanity as it was.

Both the soundtrack and Ryan Winford's score, made up of moody, evocative and uplifting Americana, help tell the story, set the tone and offer respite. The film, in part, is simply an ode to

the therapeutic power of music.

There's a lot in common with Danny Boyle's *28 Days Later* with the characters' singular goal and interaction with the normal, whether that be Mickey winning on a scratch card or Boyle's motley crew 'shopping'. *The Battery* defines the line between simply surviving and living in a radically changed world, especially in a funny and poignant scene where Mickey and Ben brush their teeth with salvaged toothpaste and brushes.

Baseball is the linchpin of the film, a thread of American culture running through the narrative, and indeed baseball is both a source of release and enjoyment and a mode of defence. It's a way to explore the differences and similarities between the two characters, both compelling and easy to warm to, and by the end of the film, baseball is well and truly deconstructed.

It's reminiscent of Ben Wheatley's work, especially *Sightseers*. One of the things the road movie does best is making the landscape a character and not just a set-piece. The locations are reminiscent of *True Detective* and *Winter's Bone* in exploiting the Gothic sublime

of rural America. Christian Stella's cinematography is especially effective and the exterior shots are all pretty much faultless, though some of the interior sequences are grainier and amateurish.

Gardner has written a decent script that sets a steady pace. Characterisation never feels forced, though a lot of Ben and Mickey's interaction was ad-libbed. It really gets to the heart of disassociation, tackling men away from women in a bold way. It's an exploration of American life and values through zombies; like Romero, the zombie is a tool to subvert, satirise and explore.

The Battery is one of the most refreshing and candid zombie films to come along in a good while. It has oodles of charm, which is more than can be said for a lot of living dead flicks. Just don't go looking for a straight-up zombie film; you won't find one. Instead you'll find something better; something existential, engaging and moving.

Extras: None

DOMINIC CUTHBERT



OST

THE STARBURST
GUIDE TO THE LATEST
SOUNDTRACKS
BY NICK SPACEK



Intrada Records has dropped a masterful series of releases in the last month. For the 1988 seagoing horror thriller *Deep Rising*, the label presents an expanded version of Jerry Goldsmith's score, going to the original Sony 3348-format 48-channel digital session masters to put out the entire score, rather than the truncated 10-track release on Hollywood Records in 1998. Pino Donaggio's score for *Crawlspace* also went back to the vault for the "pristine" master tapes for the music, and it shows. The eeriness is made crystal clear, and the 1986 recording comes highly recommended for fans of works that bridge the gap between creepy electronic and brassy uncomfortable work. Less disturbing is the heretofore unreleased David Newman score for *Bill & Ted's Excellent Adventure*. There was a soundtrack with the various hair metal tracks that saw release, but Newman's light, adventuresome score never had a proper release until now. All three are available on compact disc with detailed liner notes.

Waxwork Records kept teasing the inevitable release of the *Friday the 13th* score by Harry Manfredini, posting sneaks of the artwork, as well as clips of them in the mastering studio, with the iconic theme blasting out of the speakers. Then, the label finally revealed three clips from the remastered score, along with

the complete Jay Shaw artwork. The Manfredini score will see release August 29, with liner notes from Manfredini and director Sean Cunningham. Vinyl will be in three different colours: woodland green and brown haze with blood splatter, deep murky green, and blood-filled vinyl – limited to only 100 copies. Details on the blood-filled vinyl are being kept close to the chest, but given the way the label's been pushing pressing possibilities (having created the first vinyl LP with a different color on each side

for *Rosemary's Baby*), we're expecting amazing things.

For those who can't wait until then, Waxwork's release of *Chopping Mall*'s officially out this month, with Chuck Cirino's never-released original score. It comes out at the end of July on 180-gram fluorescent-pink vinyl, with a limited run of 500 neon yellow variants. The killer robot flick is a particular favorite of mine, and I'm extremely excited to have this spinning soon.

One Way Static has pre-orders up for their *Phantom of the Opera* re-score by The Laze. In a departure from the label's usual reissues, this is a modern interpretation of the 1925 Lon Chaney film. The Laze is a 7-piece band that falls somewhere between Goblin's bombastic progressive rock and the orchestral grandiosities of Bernard Herrmann. The score's an amazing piece of work, which The Laze toured with several years ago, performing the score live alongside screenings of the film. It pulses and throbs, working in Carpenter-esque minimalism while still blasting out of the speakers.

The record ships the middle of next month, and the vinyl comes on clear/black split or as clear with black and white spatter, with variants inserted randomly and limited to 500 numbered copies of each worldwide. Each LP will include a streaming card, with a link to where you can watch the film and soundtrack synced, exclusive to the vinyl release. It's also available via digital download, CD, and cassette, and those formats offer a bonus track not available on the vinyl version.

SPACELAB9 continues its string of interesting releases with a double vinyl LP of Clinton Shorter's score to the 2009 Neill Blomkamp film, *District 9*. It





comes in a gatefold jacket with a poster, and supposedly features a bonus track, although everything I've seen thus far lists the same pieces as those that are on the original Sony CD version.

Milan Records is putting out the soundtrack to Mike Cahill's new film, *I Origins*, this month. Cahill directed the sci-fi indie, *Another Earth*, a few years back, and *I Origins* looks to be another emotionally resonant exploration of new frontiers. The soundtrack features an electronica-driven score composed by Will Bates and Phil Mossman, along with a song each from Radiohead and The Do. It's very swirling and hypnotic, and leaves me wanting to see the film as soon as possible. The *I Origins* soundtrack is available on compact disc, as well as digitally.

Yet another new label has appeared on the scene since last month's column. This time, it's Lunaris Records, based out of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the United States. Their first three releases have them bursting out of the gate with serious power — they've *Witchboard*, *Street Trash*, and *Night of the Demons*. Details about *Night of the Demons* are hard to come by, but the label's first release is Rick Ulfik's unreleased score to the killer-booze hobo actioner *Street Trash*, with art by Haunt Love. *Street Trash* has vinyl coming later this month, but is now available on CD and cassette. The CD comes with four bonus tracks, as well. *Witchboard* comes with a 7-inch vinyl record, which features Dennis Tenney's main theme and end credits on the A-side, and a *Witchboard* design etched in the B-side.

After what seems like an interminable wait, Death Waltz Recording Company announced an official release date for Sinoia Caves' *Beyond the Black Rainbow* score. It's not until September 2, but after waiting for ages, a few more months won't kill anyone. It's a split release with the United States independent label Jagjaguwar, and the Death Waltz version is exclusive to Europe. It's housed inside a super-glossy casebound sleeve, an obi strip, on smoked clear and red vinyl. The score, for those who've seen the fantastic film, is almost a character in and of itself, as the movie contains absolutely minimal dialogue. Highly recommended for anyone who's been looking for the sweet spot where Boards of Canada and John Carpenter meet for tea with Tangerine Dream.

However, if you're looking to get beyond the reissues and new releases, and you'd like a guide to what to look for when you're at the shops, take a listen to the fantastic soundtrack podcast, *El Diabolik's World of Psychotronic Soundtracks*. I discovered it as a link from the excellent online film score bulletin board, Spin the Blackest Circles, but El D and Simon McLean have been doing the show for over four years now.

"We started the podcast at the beginning of 2010. Initially, it was going to be a general music podcast, but the person I was supposed to be recording it with kept putting it off," says the host, "So I went ahead and recorded a podcast on my own, while waiting for him. As I was a bit nervous in starting on my own, Simon

McLean was supposed to just be my guest for the first show, 35 episodes later, he's still here."

McLean's very happy to be a part of the show, he says. "I was very pleased to be asked — when we started, I had no idea I'd still be doing it four years later, but certainly, when we did the first one there was a definite sense of, 'We could be onto something here!'"

The show gets a steady amount of downloads every month but, as El Diabolik says, "Obviously, some shows are more popular than others."

The show has no actual criteria for what makes it onto each episode — aside from things like the most recent one, which focused on television music. Mostly, says El D, it's music from a certain period.

"Loosely, this would be from 1962 to 1985. When we started, I had no idea why we only played music from that period, but when I thought about it, I realised it all seemed to start with the early sixties and the beat boom of The Beatles, et cetera. From the early '60s, popular music invaded film scores, from John Barry's score for *Dr No*, with Vic Flick's twangy guitar, to Ennio Morricone's *A Fistful of Dollars* with Alessandro Alessandroni's whistling and twanging guitar, to people like James Brown and Isaac Hayes putting soul and funk into film scores. Then, later, [there's] the rise of the synthesizer with the likes of John Carpenter — these are the sounds that make a psychotronic soundtrack."

El Diabolik also DJs, mostly in London. "Mostly film nights, various clubs and bars," he says, although, "I DJ at a few vintage events and quite a few private events. One of my more regular DJing gigs is playing with the film club Filmbar70. Filmbar70 are a like-minded bunch who show fantastically cool films from the same era we play music, it made perfect sense when we joined up. I always try to play a set of music that fits the film they are showing that night, and of course, only ever from vinyl!"

There is no exact, set schedule for when El Diabolik's *World of Psychotronic Soundtracks* goes up online. El D tries to do one a month, "but it works out more like one every 6 weeks," he says. *TV Special II* is up now at eldiabolik.com and you can expect another episode right around the time you finish reading this interview.



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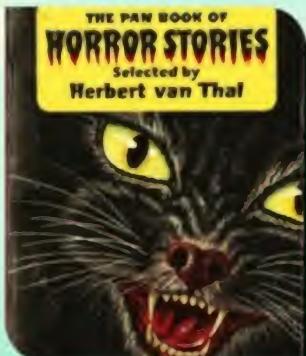


Black Library Open THE VAULT

Niche tie-in publisher Black Library has introduced a new 'Vault' service, allowing fans to access remaining stocks of limited edition novels. Black Library frequently produces specially bound, high quality versions of its books and until recently these artefacts were only available during certain promotions or by attending special events. Titles available on launch included Ben Counter's novella *Ariac Rockfist: Anvil of Fenris* for £35 and a special hardcover of the latest *Horus Heresy Anthology* for £30.

Pan Horror Homage Launched by Kickstarter

World Class horror editor and author Johnny Mains has launched a Kickstarter to fund *The Pan Book of Horror Stories Scrapbook*. The tome promises to look at the impact and legacy of the fondly remembered *Pan Book of Horror Stories* compilations that were published between 1959 and 1989. Mains is a lifelong fan of the books and is quite the authority on the subject. If the crowdfunding is successful, the book will be available by December 2015.



EU to Investigate Amazon

Amazon have been a regular in the book news thanks to their dispute with French publisher Hachette. This high profile behaviour seems have attracted the attention of the European Union's Directorate General for Competition who have been looking into various contracts drawn up between UK publishers and the online giant. Amazon have also been stepping up their own print on demand services, generating concern from established book publishers and distributors.

George R.R. Martin Raises Money for Wolves

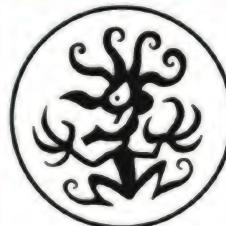
Fans of *A Game of Thrones* may have surmised that author George R.R. Martin has a soft spot for wild wolves, and the writer has offered a variety of prizes (including breakfast with him and a helicopter flight around a wolf sanctuary) to those who donate to the Wild Spirit Wolf Sanctuary and The Food Depot of Santa Fe via the crowd-fundraising website Prizeo. One of the potential rewards is a chance to appear (and then die) in one of Martin's *A Song of Ice and Fire* novels, though that option is not for those on a budget as it requires a donation of £20,000.

Angry Robot Closes Strange Chemistry

Strange Chemistry, the young adult imprint of British genre publishing company Angry Robot, has been closed. The publisher (which is part of the Osprey Group) has cited over-saturation as the reason and a "failure to carve out a niche". Strange Chemistry has been the darling of online genre critics since its launch in 2011, and was managed by talented book blogger Amanda Rutter. Titles included well regarded works such as Kim Curran's *Shift* and Cassandra Rose Clarke's *The Pirate's Wish* and will be sorely missed.

Galley Beggar Press Swamped with Submissions

Norwich-based publishing house Galley Beggar Press have been hit with what they described as "one whole shitload" of submissions from hopeful authors, ever since opening their submissions window. The publisher, known for its bespoke approach to publishing, have been lauded for producing titles such as Eimear McBride's award winning *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing*. Following the enormous response, the firm have added an additional clause to their submissions process: they want to see some sort of proof that potential authors have read at least one of the books they publish. Galley Beggar Press are still looking for some quality Science Fiction to add to their lists, though they are "Not mad on swords with names, however".



GALLEY
BEGGAR
PRESS.

ED FORTUNE
HIGHLIGHTS
NOTEWORTHY
NEW TITLES

COMING SOON



EXTINCTION GAME

AUTHOR: GARY GIBSON

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 11TH

Gibson has become a consistent source of entertaining and clever novels. His latest release *Extinction Game* brings together a team of human beings, all of whom believed themselves to be the last of their kind. Rescued by a shadowy organisation simply called 'The Authority', this team of outsiders have been brought together to rescue people and artefacts from other doomed worlds. Things, however, are not what they seem.



LOCK IN

AUTHOR: JOHN SCALZI

PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 14TH

With a name like *Lock In*, you'd be forgiven for thinking that John Scalzi's latest work might be a comedy similar to *Redshirts*, this time set in a pub. Instead it looks to be a solidly written journey into the possible future. Set in a world where a powerful new virus has made one percent of the population fully awake and aware, but unable to move or speak, technology has been developed that not only allows virtual mindscapes to be constructed, but also allows the afflicted to take over the bodies of the healthy, with all the consequences that implies.



ECHOPRAXIA

AUTHOR: PETER WATTS

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 26TH

Echopraxia is the sequel to *Blindsight*, the surreal sci-fi novel that earned Peter Watts a great deal of acclaim. This new book looks like it will not disappoint fans of the first instalment. Set in a post-singularity world where even the strangest wishes have been granted, it is a place filled with vampires, zombies and rapture-powered monks. Amongst this whirl is a chap called Daniel Bruska, a living example of a gentler age who finds himself thrust into the heart of change with the power to utterly alter the destiny of mankind.



D&D PLAYER'S HANDBOOK

AUTHOR: MIKE MEARLS (AND OTHERS)

PUBLISHER: WIZARDS OF THE COAST

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 29TH

The fifth edition of best-selling roleplaying game *Dungeons and Dragons* comes out this month and to say that it's keenly anticipated is an understatement. The previous edition of the game failed to capture the imaginations of its target audience and for the first time ever it was beaten to the number one slot by one of its closest rivals. Wizards of the Coast seem confident that this new reworking of the classic fantasy game will bring back the glory, but everyone else is holding their breath.



BRIAN FROUD'S FAERIES' TALES

AUTHOR: BRIAN FROUD

PUBLISHER: ABRAMS

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

Brian Froud is arguably the modern face of all things faerie-related, thanks to his amazing sense of mischief and silly fun. This book tells faerie tales from the perspective of the magical creatures themselves, mixing the mundane with the alien to deliver a unique experience and explore the space where dreams, reality and strangeness meet. The hardcover is also jam-packed with Froud's famous artwork, from detailed portraits to the most whimsical of sketches.



VISIONS: A CAINSVILLE NOVEL

AUTHOR: KELLEY ARMSTRONG

PUBLISHER: DUTTON BOOKS

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 19TH

Kelley Armstrong is one of the modern masters of the urban fantasy genre, and her fans are well aware of her steady mix of page-turning drama and bloody terror. *Visions* is the second book in her *Cainsville* series, which combines subtle horror with gritty detective stylings. *Visions* promises to be a steady yet creeping drama, bringing the characters from the previous book, *Omens*, back to investigate the case of a murdered girl and the ghosts she left behind.



THE GODLESS: CHILDREN (Bk.1)

AUTHOR: BEN PEAK

PUBLISHER: TOR

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 19TH

The Gods have fallen, their wounded bodies scattered across the world. Being gods, it's taking them millennia to die and their powers linger on, infecting the people of the world. In the fantastic city of Ayae a young cartographer discovers that fire cannot harm here. Unluckily for her this attracts an army of cultists and Mireea must do everything she can to not only save the city but also herself. Peek promises to deliver a unique and fast-paced fantasy tale and if the preview chapters already released are anything to go by, this looks to be very good indeed.



BURNT TONGUES: AN ANTHOLOGY OF TRANSGRESSIVE SHORT STORIES

AUTHOR: CHUCK PALAHNIUK, DENNIS WIDMYER, RICHARD THOMAS AND OTHERS

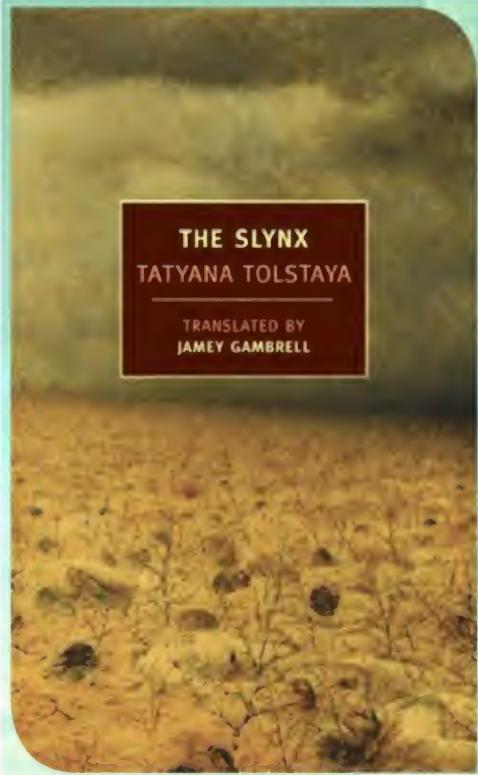
PUBLISHER: TITAN

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 5TH

Cult author Chuck Palahniuk is best known for the book that the movie *Fight Club* was based on and the writer specialises in tales that rebel against the everyday. The *Burnt Tongues* anthology collects together a series of 20 stories with titles as diverse as *Zombie Whorehouse* to *Mind and Soldier*. All of these shorts come from Chuck's own online writer's workshop, so this may well be where the next big thing got their start. As well as editing the anthology, Palahniuk also provides an intro and short

BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK
OF GENRE FICTION
BY KATE FATHERS



Russian literature is famous for its darkness, for themes of depression and suicide and social unrest, so when it comes to writing dystopian fiction... well, Tatyana Tolstaya is a perfect match.

Two hundred years after a nuclear catastrophe known only as *The Blast*, the town of Fyodor-Kuzmichsk is populated by the mutant remains of Moscow, most of whom live off mice in abject poverty. Among them is Benedikt, who isn't wealthy but at least has a job transcribing old books, and whose dreams aren't very grand: maybe

marry Olenka; maybe get a bit more to eat; never be guilty of Freethinking and get carted off by the Sanitarians; and never meet the Slynx who lives in the woods. But no one can stay hungry forever, and soon things start to change.

The Slynx is a weird book. It's strange and uncomfortable and has an ambiguous ending, and I had to take a crash

course in Russian history to even begin to appreciate the depth of what Tolstaya has written, but never once did reading it feel like work. And there's something beautiful about its weirdness, and in the fearlessness with which Tolstaya embraces her idea. She doesn't waste a single artistic opportunity, as not only does she create a complete world but she writes the entire thing from Benedikt's perspective, using his language and simplistic worldview, which adds a layer of legitimacy to the story we're being told. The effort she put in to this book sings off the page, and it pays off—not only in the emotional reaction she coaxes from readers, but in what her careful construction brings to the larger themes of the novel.

At its heart, this is a book about books. They permeate Benedikt's life, important even in a landscape where people are barely literate, yet no matter how much they're read they seem incapable of inspiring its readers to change their circumstances. It's an interesting duality; on the one hand *The Slynx* says that books are *life*. They're where we celebrate humanity in all its joys and horrors, where we question the world around us from the turning heavens to the unequal earth; they're where we can see the truth in our own history, the uncensored opinions of those who lived it. On the other, the novel says that books are only as good as the people who read them. Being able to read something and understand more than just the surface—to think about it critically—is vital to its being impactful. Literature often addresses the politics and social issues of the day, and that's fiercely true of Russia whose literary history has been shaped by the will of tsars and the censorship of Communism. Benedikt can read as much as he wants, but if he can't

figure out the history or understand the basic moral messages, he'll never really be affected by what he reads.

As George Santayana said, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it."

That's where the real horror of the novel is, not in the bleak physical world or the neighbours sporting extra fingers and cockscombs on their eyes, but in the ignorance and casual cruelty humanity is capable of. Literature teaches us our past and our morals, and guides us towards the future, and without it we're stealing and punching each other in the street. And without us, literature fades. The single hope that *The Slynx* gives us is that no matter what we do to books, no matter how much we abuse and censor and misunderstand them (as Benedikt does), we will always hunger for them. Literature is sewn into the soil we walk on. I'm sure if you dig deep enough under Saint Petersburg, you'll find *War and Peace*.

If I have to find any flaw in this book (and I have to, it's my job), it's that it didn't conform to my expectations. That isn't necessarily a bad thing, but I did expect greater social change than we got, or at least a revelation on Benedikt's part based on the reading that he'd been doing. I wanted a sign that the world I knew would be remade, and consequently the ending Tolstaya gave me was a bit disappointing. There were also a couple of odd moments that never felt settled. I still want to know what happened to Benedikt's third child.

Overall, *The Slynx* is a beautiful book. It's intelligent and thought-provoking, and the kind of novel any bibliophile would relish reading. I loved reading this book, not just as a writer who wishes that writing was valued more than it is, but as a reader of genre. Tolstaya has given us a frightening future, but one that doesn't have to be permanent.

THE LATEST RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED

REVIEWS



ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE! HORROR HOSPITAL

AUTHOR: MARK MORRIS / PUBLISHER: ROBINSON
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Stephen Jones' *Zombie Apocalypse* trilogy was an anarchic and subversive treat for living dead fanatics. The plot focussed on the 'New Festival of Britain', a satirical quip at the state of a country gone to pot. Built over the site of a South London church, the New Festival released contaminated fleas

which re-animated the dead and infected the living. Cue zombies.

Mark Morris' *Horror Hospital* is as much a companion piece to Jones' trilogy as it is its own self-contained story arc. Again the New Festival of Britain is the focal point, set in the near future with subtle historic and speculative differences; no 2012 Olympic Games and the Trafalgar Square massacre.

Set over a nine hour period, the novel is somewhere between a thriller and pulp. The chapters, identified by the change in character and time listings, present a well-paced narrative, allowing the reader to experience the unfolding infection. The black and white pictures throughout the novel, however, are as cheap-looking as they are unnecessary.

In typical Stephen King fashion, disparate characters are brought together. Cat Harris is one of the standouts, a steadfast nurse at the titular 'horror' Lewisham University hospital. Gill is also a pretty complex and endearing character. Morris, surprisingly, has a knack for writing believable women, but why he feels the need to tell the reader the extent of Gill's sagging breasts remains a mystery.

The majority of the other characters, including the comed beef-gobbling Vince, are little more than parodies. The 'gangster' characters in particular seem more informed by urban dictionaries than by actual observations. The novel would have been altogether tighter and more entertaining without the gangland aspect, which just seems to point the finger rather than

objectively representing.

The novel presents an honest, if nihilistic, portrait of London. It's politically charged with diatribes on NHS cuts and the coalition government. While these rants are infused with vitriol, it doesn't take the reader too far outside of the narrative. The zombie itself seems to be a metaphor to explore Britain's political climate.

The hospital setting taps into the reader's instinctive fears of death, decay and ageing, it's understandably a tried and tested locale. Indeed there's a medical and pornographic preoccupation with violence, taken to farcical extremes. The most engaging zombie stories are character driven, but *Horror Hospital* often opts for the easy way out.

Thomas Moreby, however, is the book's greatest folly, he's pure pantomime with a whiff of Darren Shan about him. It's a shame, there are some great passages throughout which gives insight into how good a novel it could have been.

While the zombie subgenre remains most prominently a visual medium, be it TV, film or videogame, the *Zombie Apocalypse* novels prove that the living dead are just as effective in prose. While Morris is inconsistent and preoccupied with discharge and fishy metaphor, *Horror Hospital* is a biting satire and an entertaining read despite its flaws.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT



FIEFDOM: A KINGDOM NOVEL

AUTHOR: DAN ABNETT, NIK VINCENT
PUBLISHER: ABADDON BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 14TH

In the distant future, mankind is the stuff of legend, civilisation long destroyed by insect-like monsters known as Them. After many bloody struggles, the world belongs to the Aux – man-like dogs left behind in the dying days of humanity's dominance. This is the post-apocalyptic world of *Fiefdom*.

Fiefdom shares the same world as Dan Abnett's excellent comic book series *Kingdom*, which originally featured in 2000AD. The novel moves the action one hundred years and half a hemisphere away to the ruins of Berlin. The exploits of Gene The Hackman and his friend, Oldman Gary have long since passed into legend and the Aux roam the ruins of human cities asserting dominance.

Knowledge of the graphic novel isn't needed here, any relevant information is quickly summarised fairly early on. The story instead focuses on a brave and courageous female Aux called Evelyn War.

Evelyn believes that Them are coming back. Evelyn also believes that the Aux should unite to face this threat together, and this makes her an outsider. In order to save the day, Evelyn has to stand up for what she believes.

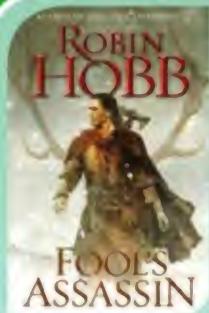
This is not a book for those with an allergy to puns. The Aux tend to have names that riff on the literary world; Oscar So Wild, Evelyn War, Atticus Flinch and so on - the puns never stop. Abnett has also given the Aux a unique pidgin language, one that is easy

for the reader to understand and at the same time reminds you that the Aux are not human. Their short, brutal language defines them very well but doesn't alienate the reader.

Abnett is a master of fast-paced cinematic action. His world building is as strong as always and this particular setting benefits from a shift to the medium of the novel. We get a more in-depth understanding of what has happened to the world and these little bits of information never fail to entertain. *Fiefdom* is a solid read and fans will lap this up and that is, as the Aux put it "truer than true."

ED FORTUNE





FOOL'S ASSASSIN

AUTHOR: ROBIN HOBB
PUBLISHER: HARPER COLLINS
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 12TH

Robin Hobb is a world-class fantasy author and is regarded by many as the fantasy writer's writer. She's best known for the *The Farseer Trilogy*, a series of books about a royal bastard called FitzChivalry Farseer, and the novels set in Fitz's world are by far the most popular and best regarded of her work.

It's been a little while since her novels have focused on Fitz and the last time we saw him, the reluctant hero married the girl of his dreams. *Fool's Assassin* takes place ten years after the events of the *Tawny Man* series and Fitz's life is one routine and gentle luxury. The book opens with Fitz enjoying the quiet life and as always, bemoaning his fate without really acknowledging how lucky he actually is. This

doesn't last, of course.

Fool's Assassin is a gently paced novel that gathers momentum slowly but surely, only hitting a really breakneck pace toward the very end. This means that not a lot happens at the very beginning, with Hobb skilfully placing plot devices in plain sight amid the humdrum activity of Fitz's nice life. Things pick up with the introduction of Bee, a new member of the Farseer line. Bee is a nine-year-old girl with the maturity and mind of a twelve year old and the body of six year old. The strangeness about her will cause all fans of the series to raise their eyebrows so high that they may go into orbit. Luckily, Hobb neatly side-steps most of the clichés associated with super-talented

fantasy children simply by making Bee believable as a child.

Those who find Fitz's relentlessly negative worldview a little much will be pleased to hear that he's not the only narrator of this tale and the other perspective is as refreshing as it is odd. Fans of the supporting cast are also well served; Chade is back on the scene and the cranky mentor is as interesting and amusing as ever, as is the Mountain Queen.

Overall, *Fool's Assassin* is a fine addition to Hobb's legacy and guarantees that she will remain the envy of her peers for a long time to come.

ED FORTUNE



THE VERY BEST OF FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION: VOLUME TWO

EDITOR: GORDON VAN GELDER
PUBLISHER: TACHYON
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

With more than six decades worth of amazing stories, it's no wonder there needed to be a 'Volume Two' of Fantasy & Science Fiction magazine's *The Very Best of*. Bringing together stories dating from the 1950s up to 2011, this collection encompasses everything from the golden age of sci-fi to modern urban fantasies, with everyone from Heinlein to Elizabeth Hand making an appearance. But this isn't just a roll call of famous names – this really is a collection of some of the best sci-fi and fantasy short stories out there.

Harlan Ellison's 'Jeffty is Five', about a boy who remains five years old while his friend Donald continues to grow up, captures the feeling of this

collection superbly. Jeffty is able to remain permanently in a world of 1940s radio shows and comic books, never feeling that sense of loss when progress makes things you once loved unrecognisable. Stories that you may have read and re-read over the years give that sense of comforting nostalgia, but also we know as readers that themes and trends will change. The modern authors in this collection seem ever aware of the legacy of those before them, and it is fascinating to find ideas reappearing and evolving, yet managing not to lose their appeal.

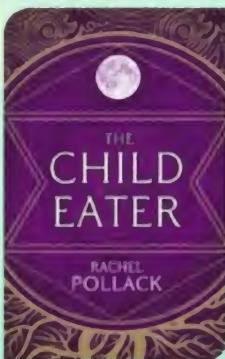
For long-time F&SF readers there may be nothing you haven't read before here, but this is still a collection worth owning – feeling reassured that your copy of Kit

Reed's 'The Attack of the Giant Baby' is within easy reach at all times is totally legitimate. We wouldn't want Leonard to get hungry, would we?

Pretty much every subgenre is in here: cyberpunk, time travel, space opera, urban fantasy, horror, humour, just bloody weird, and more. Creative writers looking for a crash course in what makes a good story would find a lot to work with here, and newcomers to sci-fi will have a feast.

Basically, it's great and it's fun; so buy it, read it, and enjoying geeking out to your hearts content.

JACKSON NASH



THE CHILD EATER

AUTHOR: RACHEL POLLACK
PUBLISHER: JO FLETCHER BOOKS
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Rachel Pollack is better known for her work on the Tarot as well as her short (and highly controversial) run on classic DC comic book *Doom Patrol*. Her Tarot books are widely regarded as some of the best in the field and her forays into fiction have mostly been set in a world of magical realism.

The Child Eater is a bold new step for Pollack in the sense that much of it is high fantasy. The book follows the journey of two boys. One is called Matyas and lives in a world of magic and strangeness. The other is called Simon and lives in the real world. Both are afflicted with strange gifts that not only define who they are, but also imperil their very existence, and both are haunted by the

wails of lost children. The titular Child Eater stalks both boys, and together they must work out how to defeat a monster that seeks to feast on their very essence.

The novel is rich with metaphor and subtlety. For example, Matya's main goal in life is to learn how to fly, whereas Simon's abilities mark him out as an outsider, making him desperate to be accepted. Much of the magic revolves around the Tarot and those familiar with the cards will be able to derive a great deal of meaning from key scenes and sections.

This is a slowly paced novel, Pollack's gentle and graceful writing is engaging and addictive but it is also very gradual. The relationship between Simon and his father,

Jack, is also particularly well done and moving and makes this work feel deeply personal in places.

The Child Eater is not the monster adventure story that the title might suggest; it is a multi-layered tale of growing up and self-discovery that also happens to have a horrific supernatural terror as its central focus. This is a book for those who like to take their time with a novel and absorb multiple meanings, casual readers may well find themselves bored. If you're inclined to the occult and like your stories gentle yet deep, then you'll adore *The Child Eater*.

ED FORTUNE



JOEL HARLEY PULLS
MONITOR DUTY
TO BRING YOU THE
LATEST FROM THE
WORLD OF
COMIC BOOKS

VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER



“Oh – July already. Hasn’t it gone so fast?” So goes apparently every single conversation this time of year – that, or the weather – awkward small-talk between acquaintances, not particularly liked colleagues or boring family members. That makes it no less true (the speed with which the year progresses, not the weather); time has, as it so often does, flown. And yes, the weather is nice. But you know what you could be talking about with that acquaintance, fellow worker or granny – comics.

That’s right, another month brings another column, packed to the rafters with news for you to celebrate, commiserate or outright ignore as you see fit. And, if you’ve followed this humble column with even half-interest since I took over the helm last August (my, hasn’t time flown) you’ll have noticed a distinct bias towards news of The Batman in much of what I relate to you. Other superheroes – DC and Marvel alike –

are available, but in far less quantity.

Case in point – this October will see the release of two brand new ongoing Batman series, and the digital-first re-release of a non-American one. First up is *Arkham Manor*, which sees Bruce Wayne’s humble abode take in the Arkham inmates when the infamous madhouse is temporarily put out of business. As you’d expect, it’s not long before inmates start turning up dead and Batman has to get down to bat-business. At least it should cut down on commuting time, what with him working from home and all.

Next is *Gotham Academy*, which follows Gotham schoolgirl Olive Silverlock as she struggles with day-to-day life in Gotham City’s most prestigious prep school. Although it’s not strictly a Bat-book, we can expect to see cameos from Bruce Wayne (the school’s benefactor) and his alter ego, as well as several other familiar faces from around Gotham.

Written by Becky Cloonan and Brendan Fletcher, this teen drama should offer a change of pace and an intriguing perspective from one of Gotham’s less explored avenues.

Finally (and sooner), we have the re-release of Jiro Kuwata’s *Bat-Manga*, out now in digital format. Although the comics have been knocking about since 1966, they have been re-lettered by DC and are in fantastic shape for their age. Starting with its ‘Lord Death Man’ tale, *Bat-Manga* is out now for you to (re)read and (re)enjoy. *Arkham Manor* and *Gotham Academy* are due to hit in October, the former no doubt tying into whatever event Bats is busy with at the time. Always busy, that (bat)guy.

Meanwhile, in non-Bat related news, it’s a tumultuous time for some of our favourite DC heroes. John Constantine is coming to *Injustice: Year Three*. Hopefully this bodes well for the video game’s sequel – the brutality level of which could see Constantine stubbing out cigarette ends in his opponents’ faces. Well, probably not, but we can hope. Think JC is mismatched against the more physical heroes of the *Injustice* universe? Let’s not forget that this is a comic which had Alfred – Alfred! – beat Superman to a pulp, stomping on his head until his own shoes actually disintegrated from his feet. As I say, we can but hope.

As creative teams inevitably change hands throughout the year, we see Jeff Lemire leaving *Green Arrow*, to be replaced with the writers of the TV show *Arrow*. You’d imagine that would lead to comic book Ollie Queen becoming even more like



his telly counterpart, but the LA Times are reporting the opposite – specifically that “we really want to bring the old-school voice back to the character... the opinionated, Robin Hood-esque hero.” Does that mean that the beard will be back too? One can only hope. Expect the new creative team to arrive in October, as the old one departs.

Next up, Wonder Woman, where we find husband-and-wife team Meredith and David Finch taking on writing and art duties, respectively. Following Brian Azzarello’s very Greek mythological take on the character, the Finches will be exploring “her interpersonal relationships and her responsibilities to the Amazons and her fellow heroes in the Justice League.” Controversy has arisen in artist David Finch’s reluctance to use the word “feminist” regarding the character. “I don’t want to say feminist, but a strong character. Beautiful, but strong.” Whoops. Such talk is simply asking for trouble online, where message boards were indeed a flame. Misunderstood or not (and reading his comments one would certainly suggest the former) it might be an idea for Mr. Finch to learn what the word ‘feminist’ actually means before going any further with his depiction of Wonder Woman, feminist icon...

And, talking of icons, over at Marvel, the Fantastic Four may not be quite so far gone as I reported in last month’s column. Luckily for us and for the first family of super-heroes, the FF do indeed have a future – quite literally, in fact, with their anniversary issue travelling all the way to 2061 to check in with Reed and family there. Ah, see, sometimes happy endings do exist. Occasionally.

Elsewhere in the Marvel Universe, as Original Sin continues on its traumatic



way, details have emerged on their next event – AXIS. Coming in October, AXIS will pit The Avengers and The X-Men against an upgraded Red Skull, now an unstoppable force gained thanks to grafting Professor Xavier’s brain to his own. But of course. Assembling his own army of villains, Skull’s plan will spin-off into other miniseries – namely those of

Carnage and Hobgoblin, both of whom are to feature heavily in the event. Expect the usual faces (Spider-Man, Deadpool, Magneto et cetera) to pop up, with one notable exception – Wolverine will not be attending, being dead and all.

That’s quite the team-up, albeit not one that’s particularly far beyond the pale. No, this month’s (no) prize for best crossover book goes to a collaboration between DC and Dynamite Comics with their recently announced *Django/Zorro*. Movie icon Quentin Tarantino is to team with comic book legend Matt Wagner for the crossover, billed as a legitimate sequel to *Django Unchained*. Although no artist or release dates have been announced just yet, you can expect...

...Actually, scratch that. It’s a *Django/Zorro* crossover from Quentin Tarantino and Matt Wagner. I have no idea what to expect. And I love it.

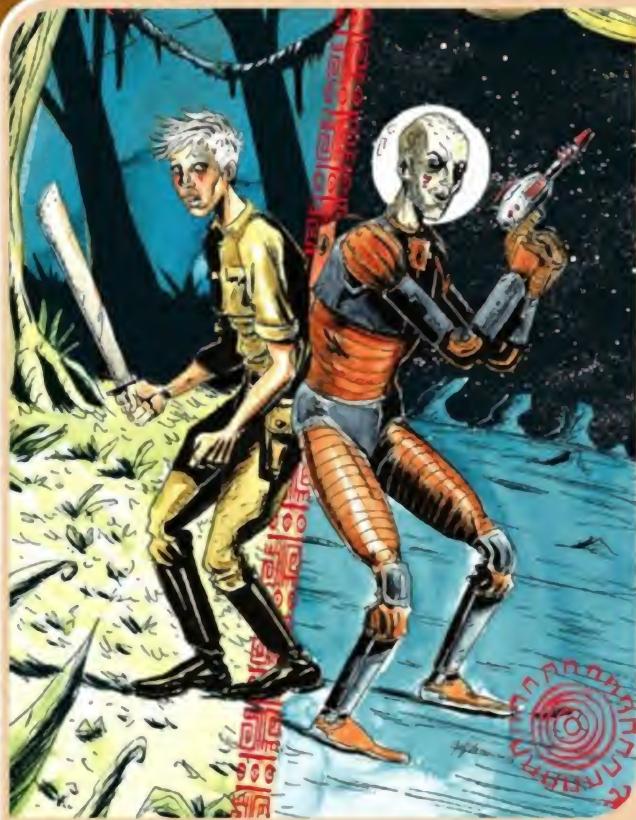
On that incredible – and still slightly Batman-related bombshell – we tone down this month’s View From the Watchtower. As ever, I can be reached down the usual Twitter and email avenues. We can even chat about how fast the year’s going by, if you like. And my, how about that weather, eh? +

Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley



THE LATEST
COMIC BOOK
RELEASES REVIEWED
AND RATED

REVIEWS



TRILLIUM

AUTHOR: JEFF LEMIRE / ARTIST: JEFF LEMIRE / PUBLISHER: VERTIGO / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 12TH

Trillium is a complex science fiction epic. Vast in scale and yet incredibly personal at the same time, it follows two different people separated by time and space. One is a scientist and diplomat from the far-flung future who's desperately trying to discover a cure for an intergalactic plague that is wiping out mankind. The other protagonist is a 1920s explorer, searching Peru for a temple said to have remarkable healing properties.

Spanning light-years and centuries,

Trillium is a love story between these two very different people. The writing is clever and fairly heavy in places; this is a tale that deals with themes such as isolation, self-discovery, man's inhumanity to man and mental health. It contains some genuinely touching moments and can be both incredibly sweet and very dark, often at the same time.

The characterisation is superb, though the narrative is quite flawed in places. Certain events seem only to

exist to present an obstacle to the main characters and don't actually make a lot of sense. For example, an important plot device is destroyed at one point simply to allow the author to explore different aspects of the narrative, rather than for any reason that actually makes sense. The tale is full of these imperfections and yet it doesn't matter too much because what is central here are the star-crossed lovers, and they are brilliantly handled.

Lemire's sketchy and distressed art style adds an interesting depth to the work. Books written and drawn by a single creator tend to be more powerful because they look closer to how the artist originally envisaged them. On the other hand it would have been nice to see someone else handle the art duties; Lemire's vision is so complete and complex that a cleaner and more crisp creative vision would have added new depth to the work. As it is, the art is functional but isn't as exciting as the story itself.

If you enjoyed The Fountain but wished that it made more sense, or if you're simply looking for an epic sci-fi romance tale then this is quite likely to make you smile.

ED FORTUNE

***** 8





DAMIAN: SON OF BATMAN DELUXE EDITION

AUTHOR: ANDY KUBERT, GRANT MORRISON / ARTIST: ANDY KUBERT / PUBLISHER: DC / RELEASE DATE: JULY 29TH

Grant Morrison is one of the most remarkable comic book writers alive today and much like his closest peer, Alan Moore, when he writes a story featuring an iconic superhero he has a tendency to redefine them. This means that before we can properly review it, we need to explain why *Damian: Son of Batman* exists.

During his run on Batman, Morrison attempted to incorporate some of the more unusual elements of the Batman mythology into the core canon. Inspired by the 1987 alternate-reality graphic novel *Batman: Son of Demon*, Morrison developed a plot line known as Batman and Son. It introduced Damian, the son that Bruce Wayne never knew he had. Damian's mother is Talia Al Ghul, the daughter of Ra's Al Ghul, one of Batman's greatest enemies. It gets even more involved, as Damian eventually became Robin, but instead of his father being The Batman, that role was filled by another former Robin, Dick Grayson, also known as Nightwing.

If all that exposition has put you off, then *Damian: Son of Batman* really isn't for you. The book combines two separate (and unrelated) stories that feature Damian ceasing to be Robin and taking on the mantle of Batman. The standalone story is from Batman issue number 666 and Morrison's usual charm is on full display. Damian considers himself a rather poor Batman, but relies on cunning and planning to carry the day. It's a

futuristic tale that contains more than a few nods to the Batman mythos as a whole and *Batman Beyond* in particular. It works well as a standalone Elseworld tale and is quite good.

The bulk of the book is taken up with all four collected issues of the *Damian: Son of Batman* mini-series, written and drawn by Andy Kubert years after issue 666. It riffs on Morrison's original premise but is a pale imitation at best. It's too bloody, too violent and simply fails to deliver any of the charm that makes Batman great, stretching a good idea too thin and too poorly. Worth it only for the original story.

ED FORTUNE



the exploitation elements than the horror.

The art is great, however. Plenty of guts, gore and curves. A lot of work has gone into drawing the reader's eye to something pretty and interesting, all the better to blow that thing up on the next page.

Grindhouse: Doors Open at Midnight is a great idea that suffers from an identity crisis; it neither embraces its schlocky print and ink origins, nor does it seem willing to straddle the line between gross and good. It is a book that needs to take itself a bit more seriously in order to allow the reader to embrace its silly yet gory heart.

ED FORTUNE



GRINDHOUSE: DOORS OPEN AT MIDNIGHT (VOL 1)

AUTHOR: ALEX DE CAMPPI / ARTIST: CHRIS PETERSON, SIMON FRASER / PUBLISHER: DARK HORSE / RELEASE DATE: JULY 29TH

Comic books have a rich and chequered history when it comes to exploitation horror stories. Cheesy storylines and unrelentingly weird ideas have been a part of comic books since the '40s and are still around, despite the best efforts of various moral guardians. Dark Horse has decided to join in on the fun by offering us its take on *Grindhouse*, a term generally associated with exploitation cinema rather than sequential art.

Grindhouse: Doors Open at Midnight – Volume 1 is an anthology book that attempts to emulate movies such as *Invasion of the Bee Girls* and *Star Slammer*. Our first story, *Bee Vixens From Mars* is pretty much what you'd expect: alien bee creatures use mutant honey to turn women into sexy flying cannibals and the only person who can stop them is an equally sexy lady cop with a bad attitude. The second tale is based around a prison ship filled with women and a sadistic prison warden.

Alex de Campi has put a lot of effort into making both of these tales feel as cinematic as possible and sadly this works against them. Instead of a cool horror comic that draws upon that medium's own rich history, we get something that feels like an adaptation of an exploitation movie that doesn't exist. This leaves the reader with the impression that something is missing and this is a great shame because the stories themselves are quite fun. In both cases the stories rely far too much on

IDW TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES



TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: UTROM EMPIRE

AUTHOR: PAUL ALLOR / ARTIST: ANDY KUHN / PUBLISHER: IDW / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 5TH

The genius behind IDW's handling of the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles mythos is that they've done their utmost to fuse all the different versions of the Turtles Universe into one

coherent and believable world. At least as believable as a world with talking, oriental weapon-wielding amphibians and trans-dimensional alien menaces can be.

Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Utrom Empire serves to give the reader grounding in IDW's brave new world, one where the Fugitoid robot from the classic Eastman and Laird books rubs shoulders with Krang and his ultimate weapon of doom, the Technodrome, elements that first appeared in the original children's cartoon. The story focuses mainly on the alien conqueror Krang and how he came to be the deadly pan-dimensional menace he is today, restoring the grittiness of the original books without taking away any of the fun.

Andy Kuhn's art fits the book incredibly well, fusing the messy, stark and over-drawn styling of Eastman and Laird's original ideas with a cleaner and more accessible artistic method that is both familiar and new. Kuhn particularly excels at his interpretation of the Turtles themselves, using clean lines and simply expressions to emulate the over-detailed style that made them so iconic in the first place.

This volume works best as a 'story so far' style tale, wrapping up and clarifying various plotlines from the ongoing IDW series. Fans will know that at some point the Turtles will have to face both Shredder and Krang, and

it looks like the entire collection of A-list TMNT villains are coming to the party. This isn't that battle; instead it's a summary of the build-up to that epic showdown, explaining exactly what the stakes are for all the major players. It works well as a prelude to war and is a timely introduction to the new series, released just in time for the new movie to come out.

ED FORTUNE



NIGHTWING (VOL. 4): SECOND CITY

AUTHOR: KYLE HIGGINS / ARTIST: BRETT BOOTH, NORM RAPMUND / PUBLISHER: DC RELEASE DATE: JULY 22ND

DC's current output is currently heavily dependent on the popularity of Batman and related spin-offs. *Second City* continues the adventures of former Robin and next-in-line to the mantle of Batman, Nightwing, aka Dick Grayson.

The plot is pretty straightforward: Nightwing is in pursuit of Tony Zucco, the man who killed both his parents. Of course, it's a little more complicated than that. Zucco has seemingly faked his own death to escape justice and is now living in Chicago, a city that is not as friendly to masked vigilantes as Gotham is. To make matters even worse, a costumed anarchist known as The Prankster is running around town stirring up trouble and breaking things.

The characterisation of Nightwing is very good here, Dick Grayson has never been the most steadfast of characters and making terrible life choices is one of his motifs. After all, this is the man who decided to run off with a man dressed as a giant bat and fight crime. His personal faults are amusingly frustrating and it's hard to shake the feeling that his first name has more than one meaning.

As plotlines go this ticks all the boxes: action-packed without going for gross-out violence, plenty of high stakes jeopardy and the usual amount of monologuing and heroism. It doesn't try to break new ground or remix a well-loved character; it uses his original appeal to great effect instead. Neither

too grim nor too camp, *Second City* is good, solid, action-adventure fun and a firm reminder as to why Batman books are so popular.

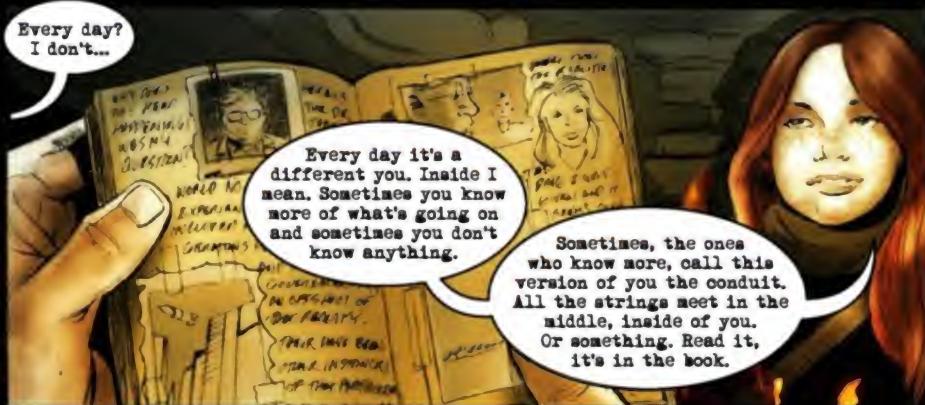
The art is functional but unremarkable, which is in keeping with DC's current house style. Though Booth is clearly very talented, he seems to be holding back for some reason. This doesn't take anything away from Higgins' writing however. *Second City* proves that when DC focuses on simple yet exciting storytelling, it does it very well.

ED FORTUNE





Grant Kempster & Dan Schaefer insomniac part 4





PIXEL JUICE

VIDEOGAMING
NEWS & PREVIEWS
BY LEE PRICE



UNCHARTED 4 *A Thief's End*

E3

So E3 has been and gone and, as usual, a bunch of good stuff was announced so how about we take a look at what each big player brought to the table?

MICROSOFT

Microsoft was first up with the announcements this year and they didn't disappoint. Exclusivity for add-on content for *Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare* was announced so Xbox One adopters will be able to shoot different stuff for a little longer than their Sony favouring buddies. The game itself looks like it's jumping on the mech and sci-fi bandwagon a little bit so it will be interesting to see where that goes.

Some new *Fable* is on the way as *Fable Legends* was highlighted. The game will continue the trend of forcing people to not play single-player, at least if you want to be the good guy, as the main game will push 4-player co-op down our throats. Fortunately, Lionhead will also give players the chance to play as the villain of the piece, harkening back to the days of the classic Bullfrog game *Dungeon Keeper*.

Halo took over soon after that announcement, with the official unveiling of *Halo 5* being followed by news about the Master Chief Collection and an anniversary edition of *Halo 2*. Far, far too much *Halo*. It may be the franchise player on the Xbox consoles but there is no need for so much Master Chief, especially when the original developers aren't even involved.

Lara Croft is also coming back. *Rise of the Tomb Raider* will continue to rip off as much of *Uncharted* as it can. However, that announcement paled in comparison to gameplay footage from *The Division* and *Scalebound*, both of which look awesome! Finally, *Crackdown* is making a return, which will be great news for fans of the super powered smash-'em-up series.

SONY

In what was a little bit of a theme for the big players this year, Sony announced an absolutely bulging release schedule of games. Bungie fans will be interested to hear that *Destiny* will be exclusive to the PS4, for a while at least. How long wasn't elaborated on but Sony got to show off the big trailer that didn't really say all that much but established that Bungie are going into space... again.

Metal Gear Solid V: The Phantom Pain
was also the beneficiary of an enormous trailer which served to confirm that the new game will be as complicated as the rest of them, if not more so. No in-game footage was shown but it really doesn't need to be to get the *Metal Gear* crew excited.

Uncharted 4 is coming to the surprise of no-one at all. The trailer for the game really took the wind out of the sails of the announcement that Lara Croft will be gracing us with another *Tomb Raider* game, which we are sure will only further delight Sony. *Uncharted 4* is expected to see release next year and it's anybody's guess how the game will be altered by the extremely controversial change in the writing team.

Little Big Planet 3 was the other big announcement but a whole bunch more games were highlighted, with some gameplay footage from the recently unveiled *Mortal Kombat X* showing some gruesome fatalities and *Far Cry 4* exciting people who like shiny graphics and empty gameplay. Perhaps one of the more interesting announcements is the return of Suda 51 with a fighting game called *Let it Die*. Simply put: it looks vicious.

Oh and *Grim Fandango* is getting remastered and released for the PS4 and Vita. Top of the "To Buy" list you go.

COMING SOON



METRO REDUX

PLATFORM: PS4, XBOX ONE, PC
RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 26TH

*Ah the joys of the next generation. With so many companies working on titles that will actually showcase something interesting, for the first year or so we just get reshapes of previous generation titles with a little bit of shine and a new name. At least in this case it's a decent game as *Metro: Last Light* was definitely worth a play in anybody's book. *Redux* should be more of the same except... you know... shinier and more expensive.*

NINTENDO

A digital conference ensued for Nintendo because they couldn't be bothered to turn up and would rather do their own conference outside of E3. Still, there were some very interesting announcements from the Big N.

Smash Bros is coming to the Wii U and 3DS, as we already knew. The big news is that you will now be able to use your Miis as a playable character so you can now officially be beaten up by Princess Peach. If you're into that kind of thing. Ahem.

A new Yoshi game was also announced, which is brilliant news for anybody who remembers *Yoshi's Island* on the SNES. The game will be called *Yoshi's Woolly World* and will be suitably cute for such a title whilst most likely playing like a dream. Also, Toad has his own game coming... moving on then.

Remakes for the *Sapphire and Ruby* *Pokémon* games were announced, which isn't all that great seeing as they were probably the weakest games in the main series. *Bayonetta 2* was also shown off and it looks absolutely amazing. This is one of Nintendo's shots at pulling back the 'hardcore' gamers but, despite the obvious brilliance on display, that may be a tall ask for the game.

So it all looks damned good but perhaps not as exciting as Sony and Microsoft's conferences right? Nintendo had an ace up its sleeve though – fully open world *Zelda*. Just those words alone should be enough to get any self-respecting gamer extremely excited.

COMING SOON**HYPERDIMENSION NEPTUNIA: RE;BIRTH 1**

PLATFORM: VITA

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 6TH

The Vita is fast becoming the console to find little known JRPG releases that simply don't fit into Sony's mainline plans. Re;Birth 1 is a remake/update of the first Hyperdimension Neptunia game, which saw release on the PS3 way back in 2011 and will see updated graphics and music in addition to a bunch of gameplay updates. The original didn't fare too well with the critics but perhaps Re;Birth 1 can fix the issues and deliver a decent JRPG experience.

Airtight Studios May be Closing

The developers of the interesting but flawed *Murdered: Soul Suspect* may be shutting down. Nothing is confirmed as of writing, but a mass sale of equipment is currently underway at the company's offices, suggesting that the company itself may be no more.

This will be a shame if true. It wouldn't be surprising though, as the company shed 14 employees at the start of the year and also recently lost Kim Swift of *Portal* fame as well.

COMING SOON**COMING SOON****inFAMOUS: FIRST LIGHT**

PLATFORM: PSN

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST TBC

You know the summer lull is officially here when one of the biggest releases you can muster is basically an expansion pack. First Light will see players take the role of Fetch in the inFAMOUS universe and can be played both as a standalone and in conjunction with inFAMOUS: Second Son. People who do link up with the main game will get a bunch of bonus features and extras but it might act as a bit of an entrée into the series for late adopters as well.

OUYA Developers Exploring Subscription Model

It was a story that we at STARBURST were all hoping would end in success. The Kickstarter-funded OUYA had so much promise but, unfortunately, initial sales figures have proven disappointing and the guys and gals behind the console are working hard to ensure that it doesn't fall to the wayside like so many that came before it.

This has led to the announcement that a subscription service is currently being trialled for the console. Available only in the US at the moment, the service

offers the entire OUYA catalogue for \$60 per year, which is pretty damned good value in anybody's book.

Clearly the aim is to expand the user base but you do have to wonder if the move reeks a little of desperation. Ouya released a statement saying: "For the price of one console game, players receive access to the entire OUYA catalogue of more than 800 titles for a full year. It's just one of many things we're exploring to give players the best value and developers the best visibility. Results of this test will dictate if/how we proceed with an official subscription program."

PROFESSOR LAYTON VS PHOENIX WRIGHT: ACE ATTORNEY

PLATFORM: 3DS

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 12TH

Released in Japan almost two years ago, Layton vs Wright combines two of the DS' top franchises into one mega-game. Whilst it has been criticised for only really fleshing out the two main characters in each series, it's still a mouth-watering crossover and, with a bit of success over here, you have to assume a sequel will eventually find its way to us as well.





Iwata Keeps Position as Nintendo President in Company Election

It's been a rough couple of years for Nintendo. The Wii U hasn't set the world alight as they had hoped and the company wound up recording record losses for the last financial year. All of this actually put Satoru Iwata's position in jeopardy for the first time in a long time as shareholders began to lose patience and his general approval rating started to drop.

Happily for Iwata the recent Nintendo annual shareholder's meeting reinstated him as President of the company in addition to reaffirming the positions of the other top directors in the company.

Shareholders were likely swayed back to the man's side following a 50% pay cut that he imposed on himself following

COMING SOON



TALES OF XILLIA 2

PLATFORM: PS3, VITA

RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 22ND

The Tales series has been quietly plodding along whilst the mainstream world seems to forget that JRPGs are some of the greatest experiences you can have in gaming. Namco's long running series is another game in this month's list to find its way to Western shores after a near two-year wait. By all accounts it's good, if not spectacular, and should certainly serve up a treat to fans of the series and especially fans of the first Xillia.

the failings of the Big N. High sales of the most recent *Mario Kart* game and Nintendo's most impressive E3 in a while surely contributed as well. Unfortunately, the man himself was unable to attend the meeting where the vote took place

as he is currently in ill health, so we at *STARBURST* would like to wish him a speedy recovery and the best of luck with the most exciting Nintendo line-up since the Wii U was unveiled.

COMING SOON



THE SIMS 4

PLATFORM: PC

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 4TH

New Sims is coming and you can bet that it will eat hours out of the lives of many a gamer. The original title is one of the most successful PC games of all time and its two sequels and multitude of expansion packs have all sold like hot cakes as well. The Sims 3 was also pretty damned good so the fourth in the series is going to have to do a lot to top it. There is a bunch of new ways for your Sims to die but we imagine the majority of new stuff is going to be related to how the Sims react to situations.

Cliff Bleszinski to Return to Game Development

Cliffy B has announced his return to video game development after going on a sabbatical in 2012. The "return" has been foreshadowed for a number of months as Cliff has been posting images of a project named Silverstreak.

Hardly the biggest news in the world but we suppose *Gears of War* fans will be happy. Cliffy said not to call it a comeback. We won't Cliff. We won't.

SUPER MARIO BROS Speed Run Record Broken

We close with a bit of fun this month. News has emerged that the speed run record for *Super Mario Bros* has been officially broken.

The man with the lightning fast thumbs is a gamer with the handle of Blubbler, who clocked an astonishing 4 minutes and 57.69 seconds, beating out the previous time of 4 minutes and 58.09 seconds by the smallest of fractions.

It is a superb achievement so congratulations to Mr/Mrs Blubbler! Video of the feat is available on YouTube.

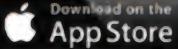
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REVIEWS

THE LATEST
GAMING RELEASES
REVIEWED AND RATED



TRANSFORMERS: RISE OF THE DARK SPARK

DEVELOPER: EDGE OF REALITY / PUBLISHER: ACTIVISION / PLATFORMS: PC, PS3, PS4, WII U, 3DS, XBOX 360, XBOX ONE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Continuing where High Moon Studios left off, *Rise of the Dark Spark* serves as both a prequel to *Fall of Cybertron* and a sequel to *Age of Extinction*. Flipping back and forth between the two universes, the game features the Autobots facing the threat of the dark spark, antithesis of the Matrix of Leadership, along with both Megatron and Lockdown. Rather than being a step forwards however, the game rapidly proves to be a shadow of *Fall of Cybertron*, brimming with lacklustre mechanics and poor design choices.

While elements and design ideas from High Moon remain here and there, this only goes so far towards making an adequate title. The shooting and most basic combat

mechanics are taken from past games and remain serviceable, but they are severely undercut by terrible NPC A.I. More often than not, you're going to be more worried about your allies blocking your path than any one of the enemies actually managing to take you down. Furthermore, no truly memorable set-pieces or major boss battles are ever introduced to truly hold your attention, and enemies rarely transform themselves.

The levels suffer from the texture quality of a Playstation 2-era release, with murky visuals and frame rate problems which ruin combat. Even menu screens are afflicted by this failing, and the game is plagued by juddering, slow loading screens which somehow manage to almost always

rear their ugly heads mid-combat.

Things only get worse on Earth where these failings are magnified tenfold. Robbed of High Moon's design aesthetics and environments, the game offers nothing here of any worth. It's little more than a careerless lump tacked onto the game to try and further capitalise on the recent film, robbing time which could have been spent creating a coherent campaign. Instead it's mashed in as if Edge of Reality had to cobble together a single title out of existing assets from two separate ones.

While *The Dark Spark* does retain a few quality elements, these boil down to occasional moments of nostalgic Easter eggs and the quality of the voice actors. The only gameplay-related bonus proves to be the option to play as the Insecticons, which is not nearly enough to warrant playing.

Ultimately, *The Dark Spark* is little more than a cynical cash grab, pillaging elements from talented studios to try and create some sense of quality and failing all the while. Strip-mining assets from previous games only serves to remind players of how much better the past releases were, and there is nothing of real value to justify the high price. Ignore this one entirely and save your cash for something better.



CALLUM SHEPHERD

★★★★★

3



XENONAUTS

DEVELOPER: GOLDHAWK INTERACTIVE / PUBLISHER: GOLDHAWK INTERACTIVE / PLATFORMS: PC, OS X, LINUX / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Initially created in answer to 2K Marin's XCOM first person shooter, Xenonauts serves as a spiritual successor to the original *UFO: Enemy Unknown*. Retaining many design elements streamlined in Firaxis' remake, *XCOM: Enemy Unknown*, the game sees the return of mechanics fans of the original have been crying out for.

During the late 1970s, the Cold War is suddenly interrupted by the arrival of a massive alien fleet. Resisting all attempts to repel them, their initial strike is suddenly brought low by an unknown interceptor. After many long years in silence, the clandestine Xenonauts organisation created to defend the world against alien attack reveals itself. Seeking the backing of both NATO and Russia, its handful of troops, scientists and engineers are all that stands between humanity and potential annihilation.

Much of the style and presentation of this game emulates *UFO* as closely as possible. While the interface has undergone a significant upgrade and certain processes have been programmed to take place automatically, it retains the complexity and level of detail of the original. Action points now allow for multiple overwatch stances, multiple bases can be created across the world, tailor-made to suit certain purposes, and your forces respond to *UFO* incursions in real-time. Atop of this, players are at far more of a disadvantage, unable to respond to most threats beyond radar range and with a far higher mortality rate among troops than in modern XCOM games.

What helps the game stand out from its predecessor is that it is more than a mere replication. Relying far too heavily

upon previous trends from XCOM games, especially research, will bite a player hard and there is a general sense of a new twist being put on an old idea. The very fact that there is now a ticking clock with the aliens preparing for full-scale war adds a great sense of urgency to events, as does the growing budgetary limitations and problems thrown at the player. Plus, even when all this becomes far too familiar, the game actively supports a number of player-made mods which drastically alter the battlefield.

However, *Xenonauts* isn't perfect. Despite now having left Steam Early Access, the game still retains a number of bugs which range from odd graphical errors to leaving troops stranded on certain levels of buildings. What's more, it doesn't explain itself very well, requiring new

players to read through and memorise a PDF explaining many elements such as the new dogfighting system. As a result it's a harder title to learn than *Enemy Unknown*. Beyond this, there are very few failings.

While it might lack the flashy graphics and budget of Firaxis' game, *Xenonauts* can easily hold its own against it. Offering complex mechanics, higher stakes and control over your choices, *Xenonauts* is easily one of the best turn-based tactical games of 2014 so far. Definitely give this one a look if you're eager for a fantastic game to sink a hundred hours into.

CALLUM SHEPARD

***** 9



RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT
THE WORLD OF
RETRO GAMING
BY CHRIS JACKSON



LEARNING THE ROPES PART 1

This month's subject has been put off for ages now because there was a slight concern it might not be strictly "genre", but apparently it counts because The Undertaker rose from the dead, so sod it, we're going wrestling!

A staggering amount of wrestling games have been released over the past 30-something years and there's no way we could possibly cover them all in a couple of pages. Not even over a couple of issues, which is what we've decided to do with this one. What we can do though, is take you through some of the highs and lows of grapple gaming and pick out a handful of trunks, sorry, titles, that deserve investigation for one reason or another. Even if you're not a wrestling fan there's a fairly high chance that if you're reading these pages you've enjoyed a beat 'em-up or two in your time. But where a regular *Street Fighter* contest might only last a matter of seconds (if you're as useless at it as I am), wrestling games are sort of like beat 'em-ups that end when you want them to. What we're trying to say is that if wrestling games don't really sound like something you'd be interested in, it's always worth giving them a try!

While Japan had seen a couple of wrestling games in the mid-'80s, here

in the west our first introduction to pixelated wrestling action was the WWF's *MicroLeague Wrestling*, a text-based simulator released on home computers in 1987. Two matches were available (one on each side of the disc), with players choosing their actions from a menu and watching the results play out on screen accompanied by digitised pictures from the actual real-life match. Not exactly the most thrilling thing in the world, but thankfully things moved on pretty quickly and fans were treated to some actual gameplay when the next generation of consoles arrived.

The simply-titled *Pro Wrestling* was one of the first to appear on the NES, featuring an array of fictional otherworldly characters including "Super Space Traveller" Starman (a

big purple lad with a star on his face, which might look familiar to viewers of the WWE's current TV output), a half-piranha half-man mutant creature known as The Amazon, and "Cold Blooded Warrior Jr" King Slender. *Pro Wrestling* is also the origin of the almost-iconic internet meme line "a winner is you", which would be displayed on screen after successfully defeating your opponent. Gameplay was exceptional for its time, with each character having his own special moves to add a bit of variety, and the soundtrack is still one of the greatest ever.

Unfortunately, the same can't be said of the WWF's 8-bit efforts. With various titles handled by developers Acclaim and LJN, neither company really managed to capture the excitement of pro wrestling. At the time the games were incredible, but it's amazing what we were willing to put up with back then. Looking back, it's absolutely baffling to think about how many hours were spent on such atrocities...

1988's *WrestleMania* looked like it had been drawn by children and played like it had been coded by monkeys. The novelty of being able to play as some of your real-life heroes earned it enough goodwill to find a place in many a game collection, but like many games from back then it really hasn't aged very well at all. It's especially jarring when you find your own character fighting against another version of the same wrestler in a slightly different coloured costume. You can accept that sort of thing in games like *Mortal Kombat* or *Street Fighter*, but in a wrestling game it



just doesn't go down too well. Characters walk like they've got a bad back and run as if they're dying for the loo, and the limited amount of moves available means that matches are more frustrating than anything else.

As we moved into the '90s, subsequent WWF titles didn't really fare much better. *Steel Cage Challenge* and *King Of The Ring* are complete duds (although *KOTR* features some hilariously awful graphics, especially on the character select screen), with only *Wrestlemania Challenge* standing out as anything close to remarkable. And it's not that close to remarkable, believe me. *Challenge* added a couple of different match types, including three vs three 'Survivor Series' style elimination bouts and the ability to play as 'yourself' in a series of eight matches in a quest to win the WWF Championship. The only moves available were a kick and a punch, a slam and a suplex, and one special move unique to each character. However, matches pretty much consisted of chasing your opponent around the ring (pro tip: this can be improved slightly by imagining Duncan Norville standing next to your sofa shouting "chase me!" over and over again) hoping that if you kept pressing your special attack combo (A and B together) eventually you might be able to knock half a block off your opponent's health meter. At least most of these games played 8-bit versions of wrestlers' theme music during the matches, which is always a treat for the ears. Unless it's *King Of The Ring* where they even managed to get the music wrong. They definitely had a tone deaf programmer working on the music for that one. Actually, play *King Of The Ring*. Go on. Just to see how bad it is. Dare you.

Having spent the last couple of paragraphs telling you what not to bother with, luckily there were a couple



of highlights that deserve a bit of your time. Based on the WWF's real-world competitor at the time, *WCW Wrestling*, released in 1990, featured twelve playable characters, selectable move sets for each character, unique finishing moves, and even weapons that you could pick up and batter your opponent with. It didn't look amazing (the phallic title screen is just bizarre), but all in all it was miles ahead of any of that generation's WWF titles.

Also released in 1990 was *Tecmo World Wrestling*, which might have been unappealing to some with its selection of fictional wrestlers but it features possibly the smoothest gameplay of all the wrestling games released in the 8-bit era. Players get to improve their attributes by "training" (button mashing) before each match, and there's a wide selection of moves to pull off. Adding the ability to

fly over the top rope to the outside, bash your opponent's head into the ringpost, satisfyingly crunchy sound effects, close-up animations for potentially match-winning moves, and a running text commentary along the bottom of the screen, this is definitely the one we'd recommend most strongly.

Meanwhile, something completely different was going on in the arcades. Being much more powerful machines, arcade games were able to give a far better representation of the wrestling world. Perhaps the crown jewel of early '90s wrestling games was *WWF WrestleFest*. It's almost impossible to describe how amazing *WrestleFest* was. Huge detailed brightly coloured graphics, booming sound effects, and fast-paced gameplay made this an absolute must during any trip to the local arcade (or Blackpool Pleasure Beach in my case, in the arcade next to the log flume, by the candy floss stand). Featuring a tag team tournament mode and an over the top rope Royal Rumble elimination match, the wide variety of moves on offer combined with the brutal difficulty of some of the later fights, and the ability to add more money to restore your health bar meant that this cabinet must have eaten countless thousands of parents' pounds during its time. Hitting a finisher then launching your final opponent over the top rope to win the Royal Rumble was one of the finest gaming thrills my then 11 year-old self had ever experienced. It still holds up today, and thanks to the power of the internet it's not too difficult to get your hands on it!

So here we are then. I knew there was no way we'd get through everything in a single article. We're at the end already and we're only just reaching the halfway point of what is deemed retro enough for this column! Join us again next month to see what happened when 16-bit consoles started to catch up with the arcades and developers started working out how to genuinely make wrestling games more enjoyable. We've got exploding land mines and jets of fire next time! +



HE'S CREATING A HUMAN NECK WARMER WITH THE ARGENTINE BACK BREAKER.

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Back in 1993, few people had heard of Richard Garfield. The only claim to fame this humble mathematician had was that he was great-great-grandson of U.S. President James A. Garfield. That was before his now world famous invention *Magic The Gathering* hit the shelves of gaming and comic-book shops all over the world. This deceptively simple card game spawned a whole industry based on collectible card games and remains at the top of a very long list of similar products. Without *Magic* we would have no *Pokémon* card game, no *Netrunner* and it is unlikely that the likes of *Munchkin* and *Cards*

Against Humanity would have been dreamt up. *Magic The Gathering* not only broke new ground by re-inventing the card game, it created whole new environments for those games to be played in.

Twenty-one years since its launch and the game has gone through three major revisions, produced billions of cards and there is a national level *Magic The Gathering* event happening somewhere in the world at least once a week. An industry in its own right, if you're good enough it's possible to tour the world playing the game, winning prize money and becoming a very special sort of gaming hero, similar in many ways to that of a top level athlete.

The game itself is pretty simple: you and your opponent each have a deck of cards and twenty 'life' points. The aim of the game is to reduce your opponent to zero life by using the special effects on the cards. Damage can be dealt either through summoned monsters or through certain spells. The spells themselves are fuelled by 'land' cards, which typically make up a good portion of the player's deck. Spells come in one of five colours Red (Fire), Blue (Water), Green (Nature), White (Divine) and Black (Death) and so do the lands, with red lands typically being filled with volcanoes and so on.

The more detailed (and complex) rules appear on the cards themselves. There are a great many tiny twiddles and game changing elements to the game, mostly explained by keywords on the card. The game's designed so that the learning is incremental; the more you play the more you

learn and the more you build a winning strategy. Slowly but surely you become more and more addicted to the pretty little cards. Each card is also covered in gorgeous artwork, a feature which has made *Magic* the world's most prolific distributor of fantasy art.

The decks themselves can be customised to each individual player's needs, allowing for a vast variation of play style and design. This also means that information on decks created by world champions is keenly sought after and the internet is filled with this and that winning strategy. In a way, it's a sport anyone can play; physical fitness is not needed, just a keen mind and a willingness to study making this a game fit for anyone of any body type. Certainly the fanaticism of a hardcore magic player easily matches the mania we associate with football.

The tournament scene itself is closely followed by many of the fans. Though games of *Magic* are played all the time all over the world (statistically there is never a time when someone somewhere isn't playing it), key tournament games are live-streamed over the internet and again, much like the world of sports, some commentators are favoured over others.

I was lucky enough to visit the British *Magic The Gathering* Grand Prix event when it was in Manchester this year and the community is a close-knit yet friendly one. It's quite self-aware and accepting of new faces and has a willingness and desire to make itself as friendly and open as possible. It is, however, a competitive game and people can get a little bit too excited and overly intense, so good sportsmanship is constantly and firmly encouraged. For the most part the positive nature and friendly, fun approach to the community wins through and like any large geek community brought together over the common love of a single thing, there's an overall sense of joy





to these events that make them as addictive as the game itself.

The UK scene has produced some of the top level commentators, co-ordinators, organisers and inventors. Britain is at the cutting edge of the *Magic* community – friendly, smiling British people are a ubiquitous feature of the hobby all over the world. Sadly we haven't produced that many champions, so far none of the big prizes have been taken home by someone from the UK, and the major winners tend to be American, Japanese or German. Our lack of a trophy is entirely in keeping with the character of the nation, after all we're enthusiastically rubbish at tennis and football, we may as well apply the same principles to the world's most popular collectible card game. Still, it would be nice to see the mainstream media make a fuss about our chances at least once in a while.

Speaking of the many lovely Brits who run around helping the wheels of this cult past time turn, I was lucky enough to catch up with Dan Barret, one of the specialists

who co-ordinate the community on behalf of the game's publishers, Wizards of The Coast. Dan showed me the latest translation of the game into a digital format, *Magic 2015 - Duels of the Planeswalkers*. At the time of writing it wasn't available to the general public so it was even more fun to get to have a go at this new version of an old classic.

The 'app' version is pretty neat. It's very, very similar to the physical game but all the cards you have are stored on your device. This is a godsend for those of us who simply don't have the space (or cash) to rack up huge collections of cards. This game doesn't contain every single card type ever produced for the game; *Magic* has gone through some fairly radical rule changes over its two decade history and many of the older cards are irrelevant to the modern game. It concentrates on the recent series of releases instead, which is still pretty comprehensive. The artwork on each card is also crisp and clear, which is nice, especially sometimes the art on the

cards suffers because of the lack of space.

The full set of cards can only be unlocked by playing through the various campaign modes, which also handily tutor the player through the myriad of gaming strategies and deck-building. (I understand that there may also be cheat codes if you're the impatient sort.) The electronic version can also be used to play other people, though both players need the same sort of version of the game - an Android app user can't play against someone who has the Xbox version, sadly.

Like many a successful franchise, storytelling is also a key part of the game's enduring appeal. Though the earlier versions of the card game featured a rather generic fantasy world, these days the world of *Magic: The Gathering* is a fully integrated affair. The heroes of the game are *The Planeswalkers*. These are the wizards who are duelling each other, have the power to walk across realities, trawling around from world to world, each with their own agenda and back-story. Each game is meant to be a duel between Planeswalkers, and the expanding story of the *Magic: The Gathering* universe is one of duelling wizards travelling to far off places to deal with a variety of threats. The bulk of this story is told through the art on the cards and snippets of prose printed on certain cards. More recently, IDW have produced a comic book detailing the adventures of one particular Planeswalker and there are also enough spin-off novels to fill a book shelf.

A feature film is currently in development and given the broad and sweeping nature of the inter-dimensional, multiple character adventure story, it will be interesting to see if they can do it justice.



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The Nurse and the Butcher

By Peter Turner

All I used to think about was escape. Now I'm way beyond that. If I don't escape I'll die. But what will be left of me if I ever do get out of here? I doubt I'll even survive. I just want the pain to stop now. If that means death then so be it. Survival will just mean more pain and I'm completely broken. I suspect that is the point.

I miss being able to see. Where my eyes were, there are only bleeding holes. They may have bandaged me, I don't know. My senses are a mess. Either way, they took my eyes. Burned at first then something went inside to scoop out what remained. It was the scariest, most painful thing I had ever experienced but it got even worse.

I screamed and screamed but they have no mercy. They don't laugh, they don't speak, they don't do anything but hurt me. I've tried pleading and crying and fighting but it's useless. I'm still here in the chair trapped by my restraints, numb to much of the pain but always with new, fresh, horrific wounds. I'm terrified. Terrified of them coming back. Terrified of how long this will go on for. I have to escape... Even if it's just to kill myself and put an end to the pain.

I'm in a cell. It could be anywhere. I don't know how long I've been here or why I'm here or who is torturing me. I remember the cell from before they took my eyes. Dark with only a single blacked out window. Nothing on the walls, nothing on the floor. No means of escape except the locked door. The chair I sit, sleep and shit in is metal and clamped to the floor. I've been naked since I got here and mostly covered in piss, blood and shit. Occasionally they come in and spray me with a high powered hose. I'd say it was a relief to be rid of the smell and filth but even the hose hurts. I didn't realise this cell would be the last sight I was ever going to see.

I'm living a nightmare. I don't sleep. I just shiver, cry, doze and wake up screaming. I'm in hell and my tormentors want to keep me in constant pain. I know there is no end to this. It's just going to go on and on until they end it. How much pain and suffering can someone endure? A lot more than I ever expected.

They sew me up, bandage me, feed me, soak me. They take care of me, ensuring that I don't die. They have no sympathy and they never tire of torturing me. They took my teeth, fingers, toes, even my cock. Cutting, sawing, chopping and tearing. I have screamed until even my voice has been taken from me. I've had things forced inside me... More pain than you could imagine.

They saved my eyes until very recently. I should have seen it coming. Everything else I watched through gritted teeth, watery eyes, gripping fists. Until one by one they took them all from me. I have bled, passed out, vomited and shit myself countless times. It never stops.

Every morning they enter my tomb. I hear the sound of the locks and I shake violently and uncontrollably. More than a shiver, it's a full-on convulsion. I cry and choke, losing the ability to breathe properly. Panic courses through my veins and I rage against my restraints. It's never any good. They change or check the restraints regularly. Too smart, too determined, too well organised, they know exactly what they are doing and they never mean to let me get away.

I used to raise and turn my

head when they entered to see which one it was. Now I can barely lift my head anymore. I'm so tired and worn down and even if I could lift my head, I can see nothing. I'm stuck in an endless cycle of pain, endurance, despair, partial recovery and then more pain. I am trapped, hopeless and terrified.

Neither of them speaks to me. They don't even speak to each other when they are in the dungeon. He does the torture. She does the stitching. He hurts me, she heals me. Neither takes any pleasure in it. They do it because they have to. Sometimes they come together, sometimes just him. A few times she came alone. She sat in a chair in front of me. She would check the restraints, blindfold and gag me and sit there in front of me crying. I would writhe and try with all my strength to break free, even just to speak to her. If I could just communicate I could solve this. But then she would rise out of her seat and spit in my face before leaving. A venomous spit, full of anger and hatred.

I know why she hates me. I knew as soon as I first saw the man who keeps me caged. I used to see them in the park together, happy and laughing. Now they never laugh. They never go to the park. They come down here and they murder me slowly, painfully and carefully, inflicting as much pain as possible without allowing me to die.

I used to call them the nurse and the butcher but now I have no idea who is doing what. All is dark. All is pain. My mind swims in insanity. It seems like I'm

always half laughing, half crying. I'm never awake and never asleep. When the sound of the locks hits my ears, I squirm but part of me hopes this is it. The end, finally. What else can they do to me? I'm destroyed. All that is left to do is kill me, surely.

They cut off the tops off my ears, shave my head and slice me. Just when I think it's almost over, they return and find new ways to punish me. One day they soak me in petrol. This is it. I still fear the end but more than anything I'm glad they are going to finally kill me. I writhe violently, more violently than ever. Why does it have to be burning? I scream my lungs out and then suddenly he is on me. He grabs my jaw as I scream. Quick as a flash he slices the sides of my mouth open, sticking his rough fingers in my mouth to grab my tongue. With my cheeks wide open, he easily grabs my tongue and then I feel my mouth fill with blood. The sound of my scream stops. My tongue is gone. The pain is horrendous and I cry a tearless, soundless wail. I welcome the flames now. Light me up, I scream inside my head. I deserve it. I don't want to live like this. Fucking do it. Please fucking kill me. Silent screams. Hopelessness.

No flames come. I feel a bandage being wrapped tight around my jaw. Then the restraints are coming off. I fall to the floor, no fight left in me. I feel a poke in my arm. Drowsiness drains me and thank God, I'm gone.

When I come to, I can feel sun on my naked, deformed body. Sun. I must be outside. I hear children screaming. No, playing... children playing. Then someone really does scream. I hear people shouting, footsteps running towards me. Hands are all over me. Screaming, crying, calls for an ambulance. It is all too quick for me to comprehend. I relish the touch of the sun even if I cannot see it. I'm carried away, into a vehicle. Sirens blare.

As I'm wheeled out of the vehicle, I hear people talking. They can't comprehend what has happened. I hear someone say where I was picked up. They found me in the park where I snatched the child from, the child of the nurse and the butcher. With no fingers, no teeth, tongue or toes, I'm unidentifiable. These people nurse me but they will never know who I am and what I did.

Art: Rylan Cavell

PAUL MOUNT'S



This month's column has a graveyard stench about it as we look at the second series of BBC Three's 'zombie' drama *IN THE FLESH* and wonder what went wrong for *ALMOST HUMAN* and *BELIEVE*, two more casualties from the US 2013/2014 TV season...

Sometimes I just don't know what you people want. With AMC's *The Walking Dead* just about one of the biggest shows on American television (and, consequently, in the world) you'd think that a British bite into the zombie zeitgeist might attract a less anemic audience than the numbers who have been tuning in for the second season of BBC's bleak but beautiful *In the Flesh*. The two shows couldn't be more different, of course and yet they share the same DNA. *The Walking Dead*'s tale of survival in a world where the zombies aren't the only monsters is sometimes gut-punchingly dramatically powerful as well as gloriously gruesome and action-packed. *In the Flesh* is no less dark (and frequently quite a lot darker) but takes a typically British kitchen sink approach to its subject matter; *In the Flesh* is more Ken Loach than George Romero. In *The Walking Dead*, the world as we know it has ended but in the world of *In the Flesh* the rules have been rewritten and human nature is having trouble learning to adjust to a new way of thinking in the face of the impossible and the unimaginable.

Perhaps *In the Flesh* is just too domesticated and not fantastical enough for a hungry genre audience. The series isn't just about zombies, it's about acceptance, intolerance, prejudice, fear and, occasionally, violence. Viewers hankering for the viscera and bone-crunching slaughter of *The Walking Dead* (and that's the last time I'll be making the comparison because comparing and contrasting really does neither show any favours) will find themselves short changed and disappointed. That's not to say that *In the Flesh*, which started its very first run of three episodes last year with a supermarket zombie sequence

which could have been lifted from any zombie movie ever made (a witty and wilful audience misdirection) hasn't had its moments. Ricky Tomlinson's Ken Burton, a supporting cast hold-over from series one, is dispatched before the credits of the first episode of the second series by a bunch of 'rabids' (untreated undead) on a tram, newcomer Maxine Martin (Wunmi Mosaku) sees off a rabid with a drill and throughout the series we see brief, unsettling reminders of what's lying underneath the face mousse and contact lenses as Partially-Deceased Syndrome sufferers revert to their untreated state, their skin bone-white,

their mouths filled with icky black gloop.

But these are the show's only real concessions to the genre it's subverting. *In the Flesh* is more interested in exploring the human condition and examining how ordinary, down-to-earth people react and behave when everything they have ever understood about human life has been turned upside down. Still in the unassuming Lancashire village of Roarton, series one's protagonist Kieren Walker (Luke Newberry) is yearning for the freedom of the wider world but his plans to flee to Europe are thwarted by the arrival of Maxine Martin (Wunmi Mosaku), the local elected MP for the Victorius Party who regard PDS sufferers as second-class citizens at best. Also back on the scene is Kieren's live-wire 'best friend' and undead hunting partner Amy Dyer (Emily Bevan), bringing with her the enigmatic and charismatic Simon Monroe (Emmett J Scanlan), a disciple of the mysterious 'Undead Prophet'. Trapped in Roarton by travel restrictions and a new community service 'Give Back' scheme initiated by Maxine, Kieren finds that his world is getting smaller and just a little bit less safe as the Undead Liberation Army prepare for the 'Second Rising' when the 'First Risen' is killed. But who is the First Risen... and what's brought Simon to Roarton?

In the Flesh really is something very special on the British TV landscape but it's a show that demands patience from its audience; it's not a show about spectacle and cheap thrills. This is very much a character study, a slowly unfurling story about real people in an unreal situation. The people of Roarton - and, presumably, the outside world although we see or hear little of life beyond the village - live in fear of the 'rotters' becoming monsters again whilst the monsters themselves have to come to terms not only with potentially living forever in a state of perpetual half-life but with trying to ingratiate





themselves into a society that just doesn't want them. Season two's six episodes (as opposed to the three for the first series) gives the story room to breathe, stretch and develop subsidiary characters and introduce some new ones. This new, longer run not only gives us time to get to know Kieren and his troubled family better, it gives us Simon and Maxine (whose occasionally over-the-top boo-hiss villainous characterisation is thankfully redeemed by the sympathetic end of her story arc in the final episode) and, in the beautifully observed third episode, Roarton locals Freddie and Hayley. This episode, written by Fintan Ryan (the bulk of the series being written with supreme confidence by relative newcomer Dominic Mitchell who created the series), moves the spotlight away from Kieren and co for a while and sees desperate lovestruck Freddie, back from the dead, trying to rekindle the affections of his wife Haley who's moved on since his death and is

now living happily with her new partner. It's an achingly sad portrayal of love lost in the most extraordinary circumstances and, for Freddie at least, there's to be no happy ending. That's very *In the Flesh*.

Sure enough, the series itself ends with the misery of a tragic death but with just the slightest glimmer of hope for Kieren, no longer alone in his struggle for peace and acceptance and with a real chance at happiness. In the best traditions of modern TV drama, lots of unanswered questions too with the ongoing mystery of the Undead Prophet's identity and the strange government officials conducting an exhumation in the rain as the credits roll over the last episode.

The last episode? Well, the jury may still be out but in truth the omens probably aren't too good. BBC3 is going to the wall next year and the ratings have been nothing to write home about, the show effectively shunned by the very audience who should really have appreciated it the

most. Haunting, evocative, subtle and shot through with a pleasing rawness, *In the Flesh* is TV to cherish, a show about zombies for people who don't like zombies but who appreciate difficult, challenging drama which asks questions but doesn't necessarily provide all the answers.

We just don't get much TV like this so when we do it's nothing short of tragic when it gets the plaudits from the critics but the audience stays away in droves. Sometimes I just don't know what you people want.

ALMOST HUMAN

Poor Karl Urban; the guy just can't catch a break. He's buried halfway down the cast list of the new *Star Trek* films (he plays Bones McCoy - but not as we know him) and his take on *Dredd* was well-received by the three people who went to see it at the cinema. Now he's had his very own TV show, a futuristic buddy series set in a world of dodgy androids, souped-up supercars and sexbots - and it gets cancelled after just thirteen episodes.

It's a shame but I can sort of see the problem. *Almost Human* is a magnificently old-fashioned series - cynical cop gets off-beat new partner, see the sparks fly! - and it's also one which makes the fatal mistake of falling between two stools. It's a great, if slightly hokey premise. In the year 2048 the unstoppable march of new technology has caused a massive increase in the crime rate and, to combat this new tidal wave of crime, every human Police Officer is paired up with a super sophisticated bells-and-whistles combat android - indistinguishable from a real human. So that's the format and that's pretty much what *Almost Human* does. What's refreshing about the show is the fact that it's really just a simple police procedural beefed up with some flashy FX (and the production design and visuals are outstanding, really selling the idea





that this is the near-future). There are no substantial story arcs, no conspiracies or underlying mysteries; it's just about two cops forced to work together and who, in all honesty, don't really get along too badly. Karl Urban does his best to be gruff and world-weary but he's just too nice a guy and his relationship with android Dorian (Michael Ealy) is one of resigned acceptance rather than the stubborn resistance the pilot episode tries to lead us to believe and expect.

The stories are really the stuff of most pacy police shows: an armed siege, illegal body-part trafficking, drug abuse, sexbots (seriously, sexbots... yet they get away with it!). But the show falls into the trap of being futuristic but not really sci-fi so there's not enough meat to keep genre fans hooked and the robots and computer FX are just too high concept and unpalatable for an audience that just wants to see a cop show. But I found its lack of artifice and its determination to just tell good, solid, standalone stories a wonderful antidote to all those shows that demand you watch every episode in order (twice) and, if necessary, take notes to keep up with all the tangled plot threads and twisty-turny story arcs. Urban and Ealy are a warm and watchable double act and Mackenzie Crook provides a bit of decent comic relief now and again as a quirky Brit android expert who could have stepped right out of an episode of Ricky Gervais' *The Office*.

Fun while it lasted, *Almost Human* was probably too light and throwaway to survive in the cut-throat world of modern US Network TV and its refusal to be either one thing (sci-fi) or the other (cop show) was probably always going to be its downfall. Better luck next time, Mr Urban.

BELIEVE

So what do you guys do in your downtime? Me, I like to chill with my posse, work my "ass" at the gym, OD on Wispa Golds. I don't however, do what Alfonso Cuarón does when he's got a bit of time on his hands; not for him

the delights of incline bench-presses or caramel based confectionary - he just goes and co-creates a fantasy TV show while he's waiting for his computer whizzkids to knock up the revolutionary FX for his Oscar-winning space disaster movie *Gravity*. Smart arse.

The fruits of his (and co-creator Mark Friedman's) labours are *Believe*, a rather nice little show about a man and his daughter on the run from nasty people. All right, there's a bit more to it than that. Bo (Johnny Sequoyah... who calls a girl Johnny? I don't understand the world any more...) is a pre-teen girl with extraordinary powers - the usual telekinetic/telepathy/precognition stuff - who is being hunted by an organisation called Orchestra which is charged by the government with turning psychics and the gifted into weapons. Fortunately, a secret 'shadow' organisation led by Winter (Delroy Lindo), the former partner of Orchestra's sinister chief Roman Skouras (Kyle MacLachlan) are dedicated

to protecting Bo and they pass her into the custody of death row inmate William Tate, Jnr (Jake McLaughlin), framed for... wait for it... Crimes He Did Not Commit. Bo and Tate are on the run, pursued by Skouras and his thugs, with Winter and his people lurking in the background providing safe houses and refuge when Orchestra get too close.

I'm hazily reminded of *Touch*, the short-lived Tim Kring vehicle from a couple of years ago starring Kiefer "Dammit" Sutherland on the run with his gifted autistic son and pursued by the baddies of Aster Corps who are desperate to use Kiefer's kid's unique predictive powers for their own benefit. I quite liked *Touch* but I liked *Believe* more. Better written and better plotted, *Believe* perked up considerably after its slightly shonky pilot, the relationship between Tate and Bo developing nicely across the season and with a genuinely cold and ruthless bad guy in MacLachlan's Skouras. The show drifted occasionally into mawkishness in some of its stories - Bo determined to reunite estranged lovers, Bo helping a hard-up Mom fund her sick son's life saving operation, Bo trying to prevent a road accident which will kill a young violin-playing prodigy - but it never quite descends into the queasy sickness which sometimes bedeviled *Touch*.

Quickly cancelled by NBC when its ratings went into freefall, *Believe* does, at least, have the dignity of a proper, satisfying ending even if Alfonso might have hoped the series would have had stronger legs and run for a few more seasons. Perhaps if he'd had Bo's predictive powers he wouldn't have bothered creating the series in the first place and opted for a few sessions at the gym instead...

Contact me via the magic of email at: paul.mount@starburstmagazine.com or do the Twitter thing - @PMount



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